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How to Play the
ELECTRIC BASS
By CAROL KAYE

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THE ELECTRIC BASS

Getting With It Immediately

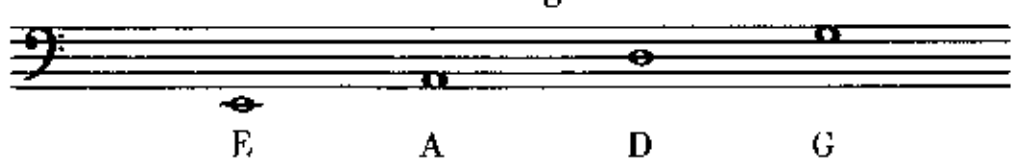
Whether you play with fingers, thumb, or pick, you will want to immediately play the current bass lines and be able to invent your own. Scales and diagrams could deter natural incentive because they are boring, so I do not include them in this book.

If the student feels that he needs the basic scales and diagrams, there are many other books on the market that deal especially with those subjects. Scales are important in certain types of music, such as: studio sight-reading, legitimate classical type music, etc. Dwelling in that area, teaching wise, is not my "cup of tea".

Setting a "fire" under a student to WANT to play good imaginative bass figures is my goal, that's why this book is different. Most of you have played enough to want to learn more about this exciting new way of playing.

On the next page is a written blues pattern to open the door to this new "feeling". Below, you will find a "refresher course" on time figures to help you get reacquainted with rhythm notations. Notes are written in the bass clef, the same as for String Bass, i. e., sounding one octave lower than written.

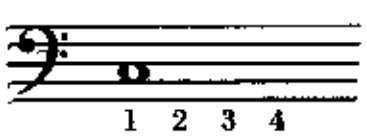
Tuning



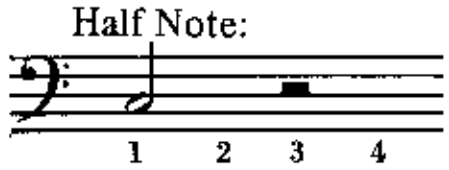
Be sure to check your tuning harmonically on 5th and 7th frets.

RHYTHM PATTERNS

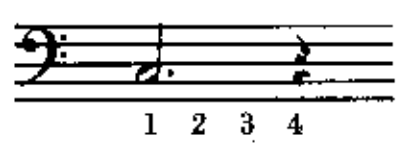
Whole Note:



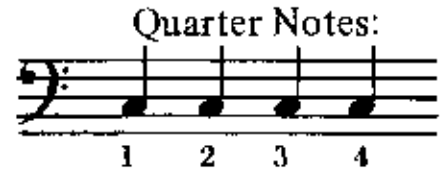
Half Note:



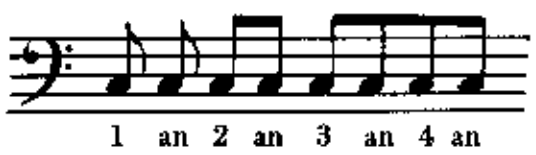
Dotted Half Note:



Quarter Notes:

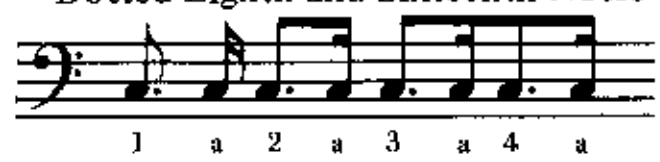


Eighth Notes:

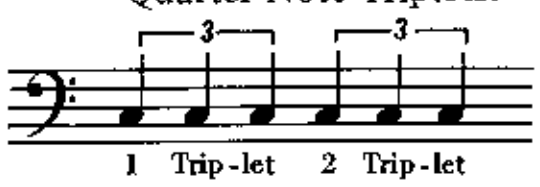


Sixteenth Notes:

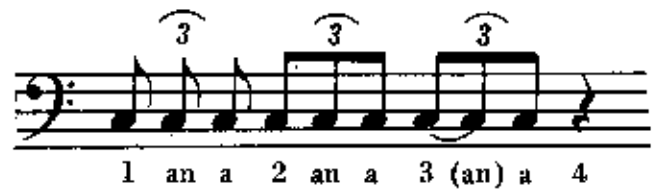
Dotted Eighth and Sixteenth Notes



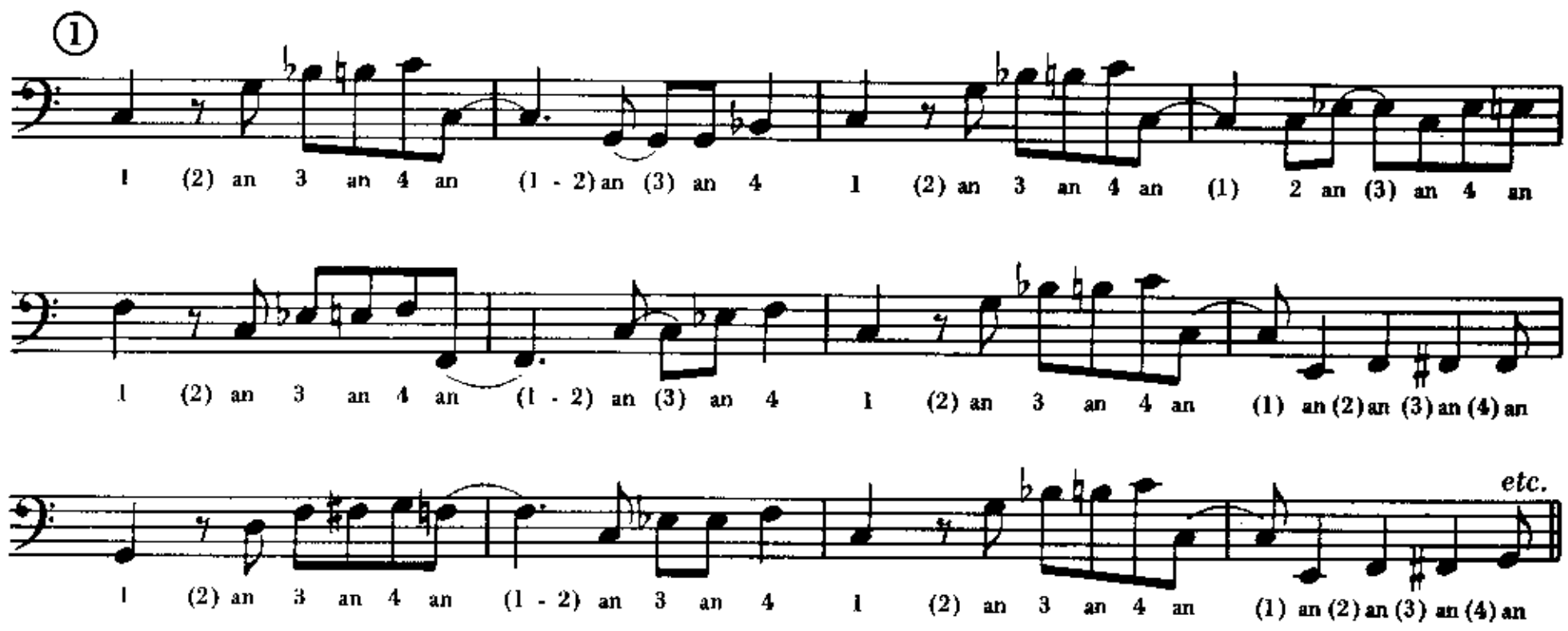
Quarter Note Triplets:



Eighth Note Triplets:



EASY BASS PATTERN



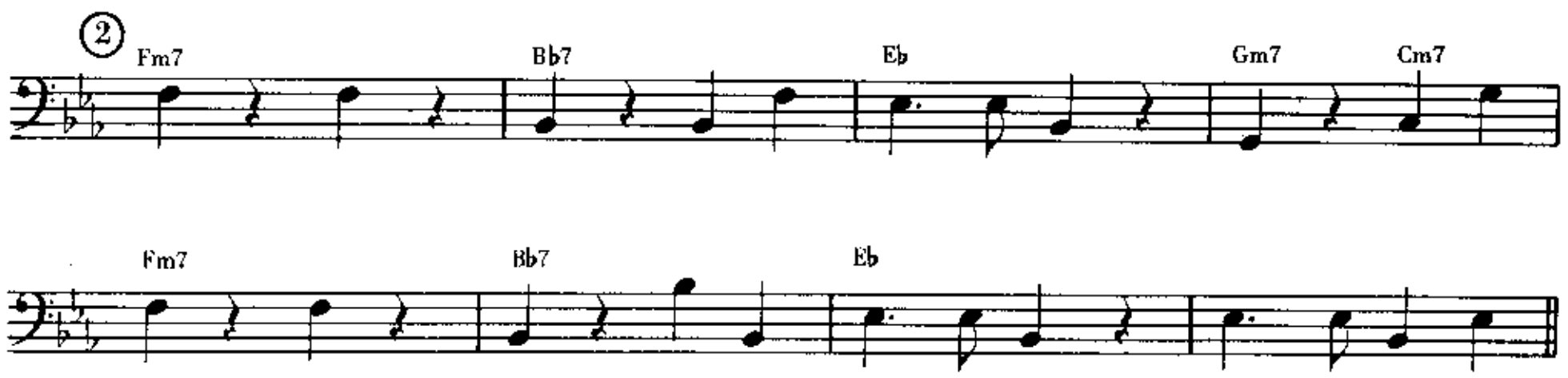
DIFFERENT STYLES OF MUSIC

Most people (including a lot of musicians) are not aware of the definite rhythmically-different styles of music. A lot of the "Soul" music especially sounds all the same to them. In order to clarify the bassist's approach to these varied styles, you will find a brief description with a suggested bass pattern for each one. One thing you will find in common - the first 8 bars of the current "classic hit" song, "By The Time I Get To Phoenix", is used for demonstration purposes in most of the different styles.

Some of the bass lines appear difficult on paper but once played a few times will become very easy. For further practice, I have recorded all bass lines on an LP record complete. Details on purchasing this record are found in the back of this book. Bass line numbers coincide with the record.

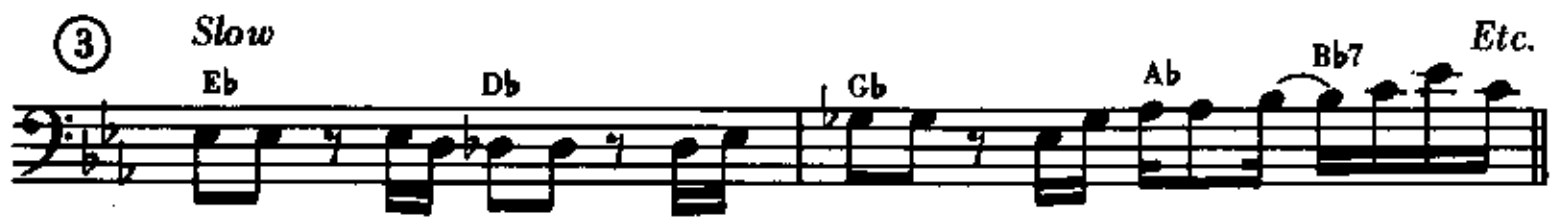
"POP" MUSIC

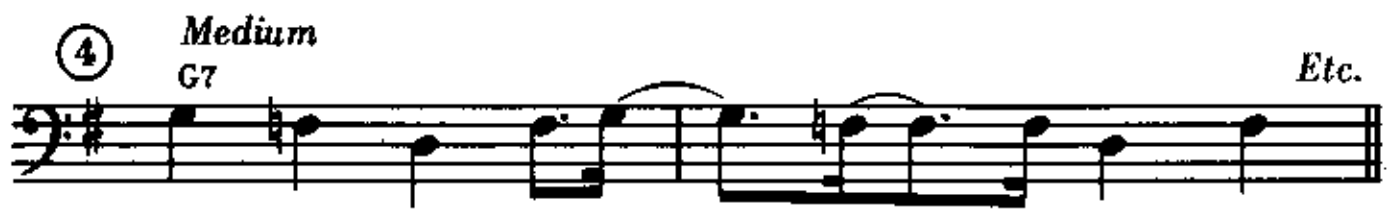
This means usually any style that isn't Rhythm and Blues (Soul), Soft or Hard Rock, Latin, Jazz, or Western. Classical music hasn't discovered the Electric Bass yet. It usually has a light feeling with easy bass patterns whether it be shuffle or straight 8th rhythm.

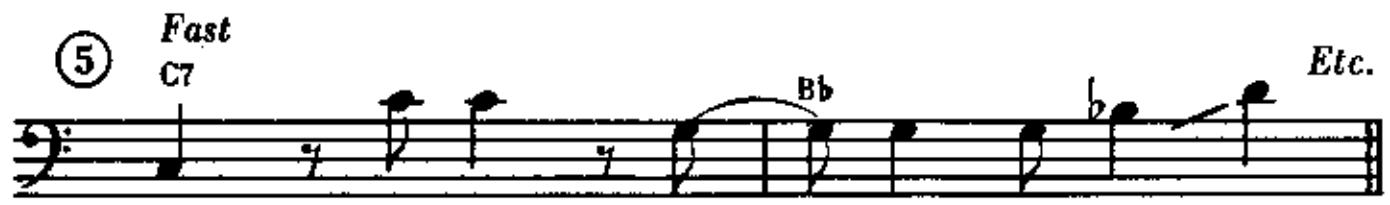


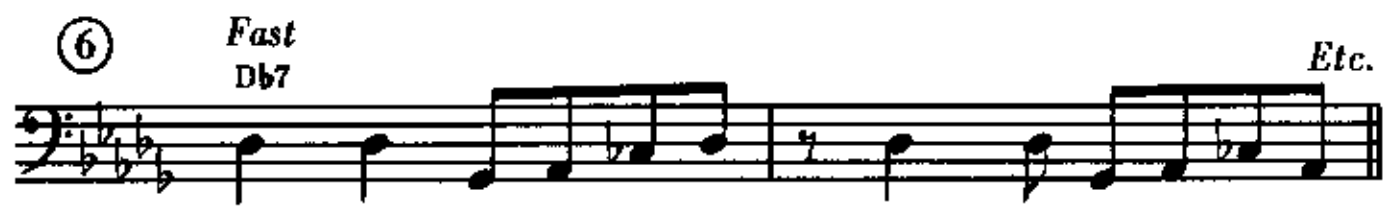
RHYTHM AND BLUES – SOUL MUSIC

Generally speaking, this is the biggest influence on the current trend of music today. The Electric Bass has an important integral part in establishing the "feel" of Rhythm and Blues. As Panama Francis (one of our earliest and foremost drummers) stated: "The bass lines today emanated from bass parts the male vocalist sang in the rhythm groups long ago". Keeping that in mind may help you to formulate a better creative style. Below are four contemporary typical bass lines to practice. These are not set to any particular song.





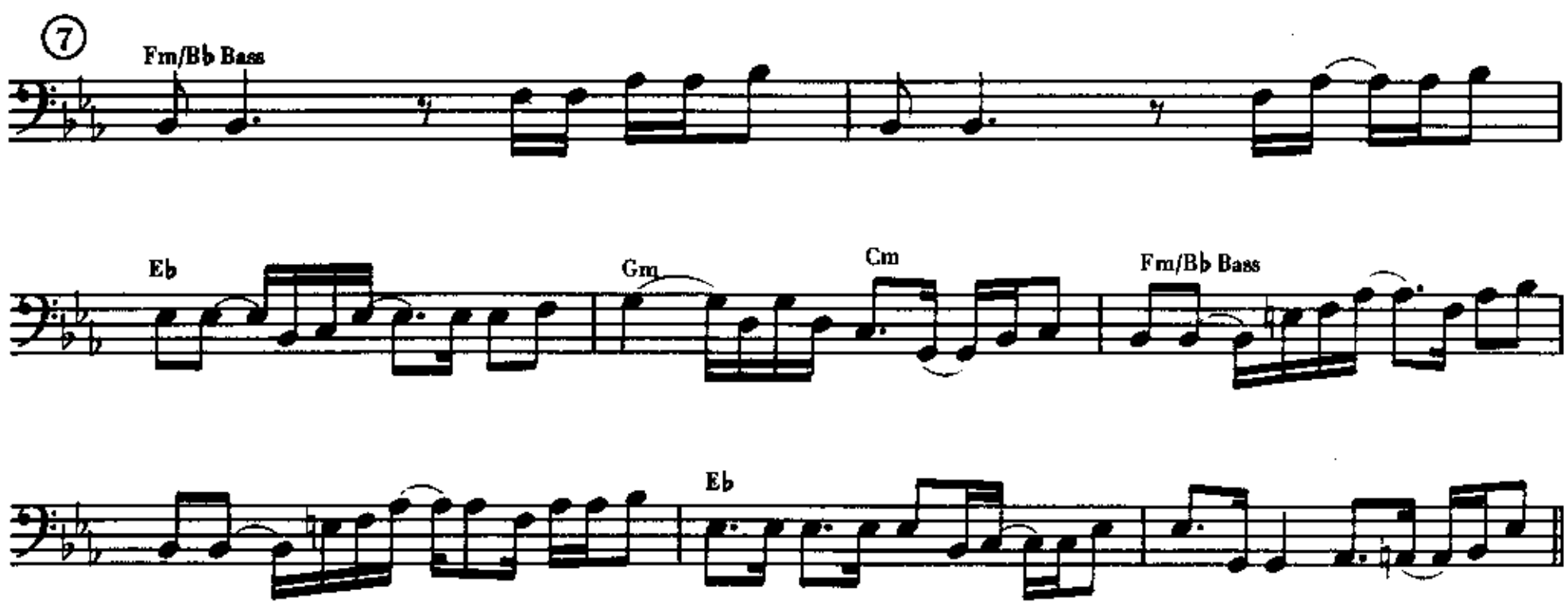


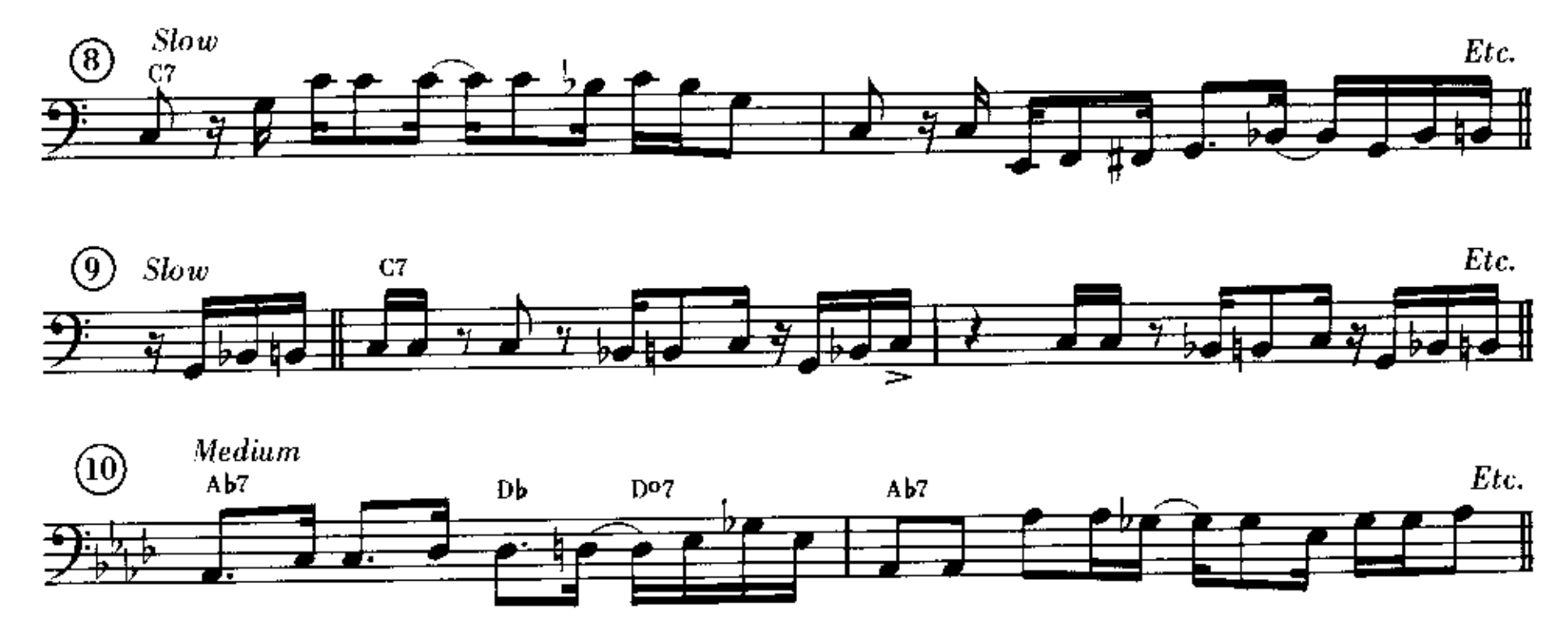


There are many variations and regional interpretations to Rhythm and Blues. Therefore, some of these are separately listed under currently available names for convenience to the player who wants to distinguish between the various differences.

THE BOOGALOO

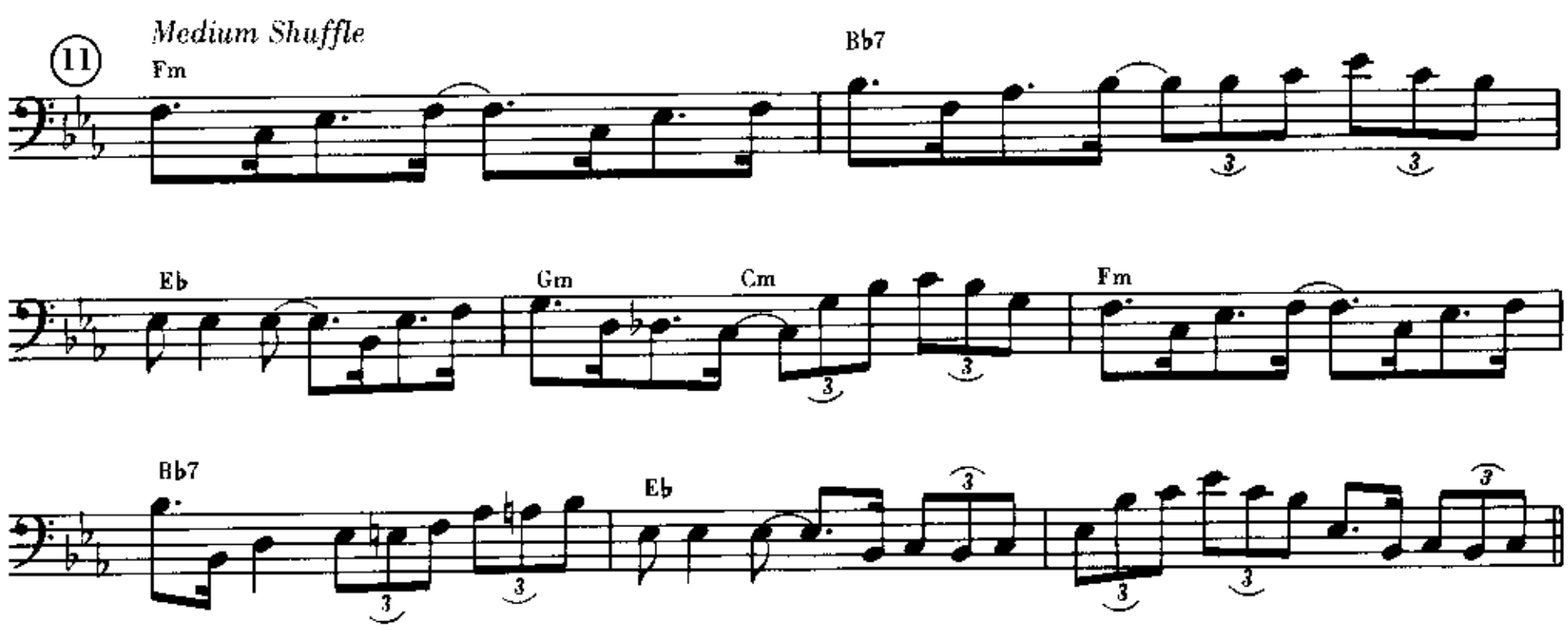
This is usually slow in tempo with a lot of bass notes to fill out the pattern. Once you get the feel of it, you can be highly creative. Lately, some of the hit records have used these patterns in very fast tempos which creates an intense excitement. Originating in New Orleans (and probably Jamaica), it has a "double-time Samba" feel to it. The bass can play any rhythm pattern that usually is played on Latin Timbales (drums). The drummer always plays straight time which feels like half-time to what the bass player is playing. Basically, it's something like this:



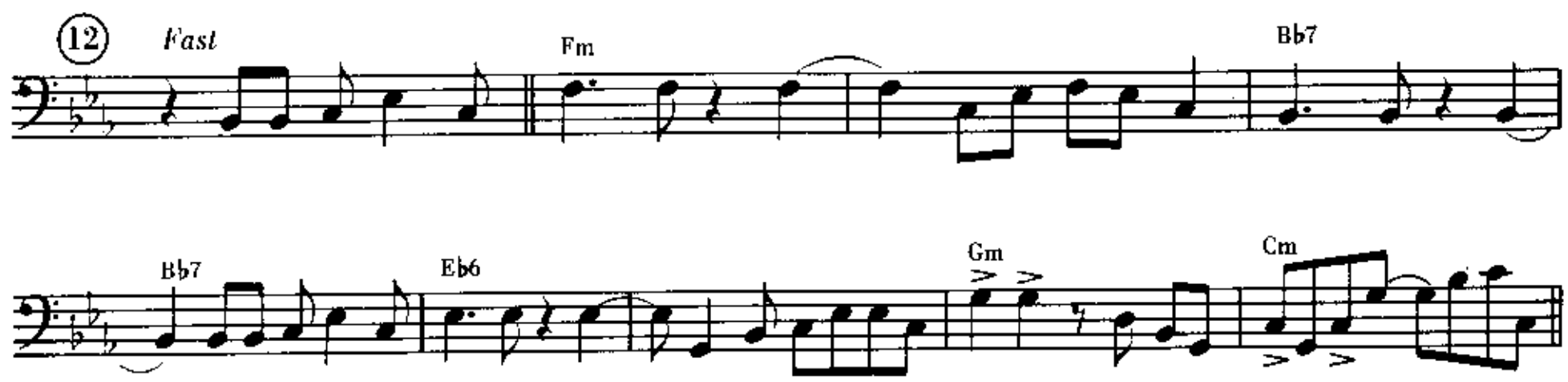


THE "MOTOWN" STYLE

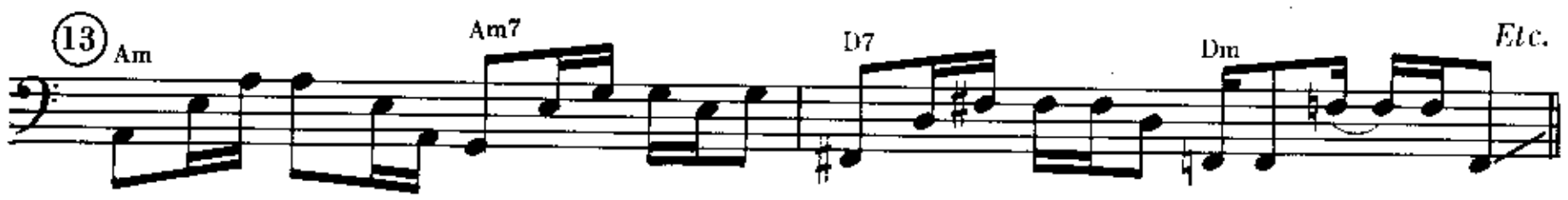
The Motown Record Company has created two different styles in their hit-making recordings as well as an occasional Memphis-Nashville style hit record and Boogaloo. This two (or really four) faceted style has helped build the Electric Bass into its current popular role as a vitally important instrument for records, films and TV music. This style has fast-moving many-noted bass patterns as you will find. Their slower tunes are usually shuffle (or tied triplets), mostly written as dotted 8ths and 16ths rhythmically, such as:



The faster tunes are invariably straight 8th rhythm and usually are very up-tempo with dynamically-moving patterns:

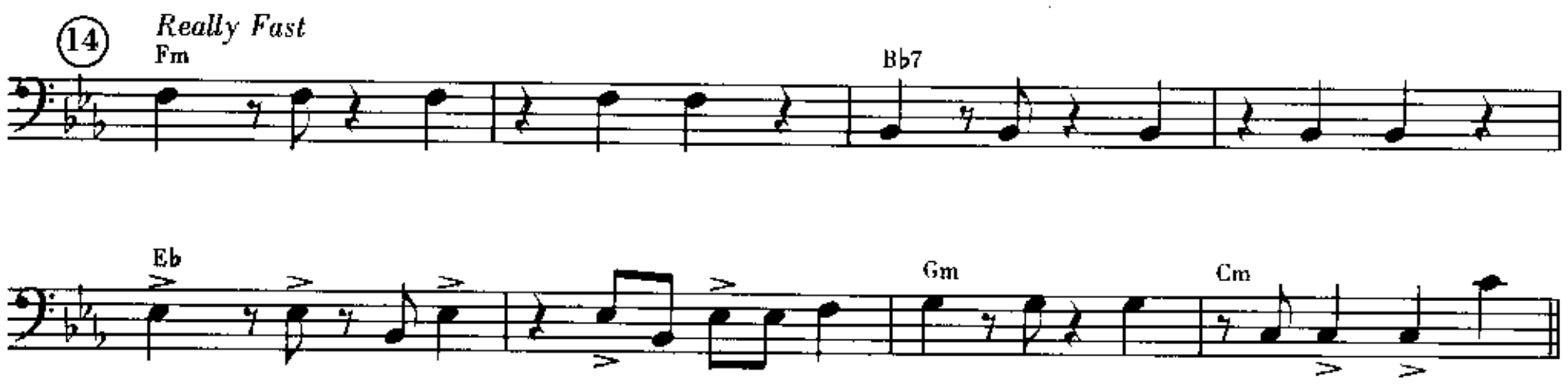


Another Study in a Slower Tempo

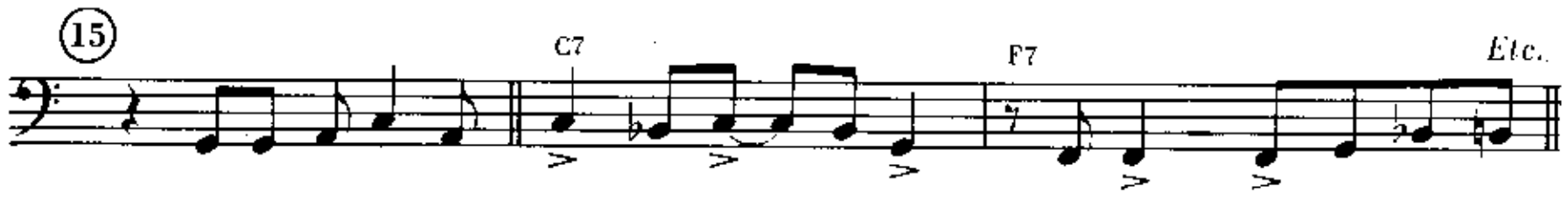


THE "BO DIDDLEY" STYLE

Bo Diddley is a wonderfully talented recording artist who created his own style many years ago which is still alive and swinging. It has a definite fast rhythm beat with accents that don't change.

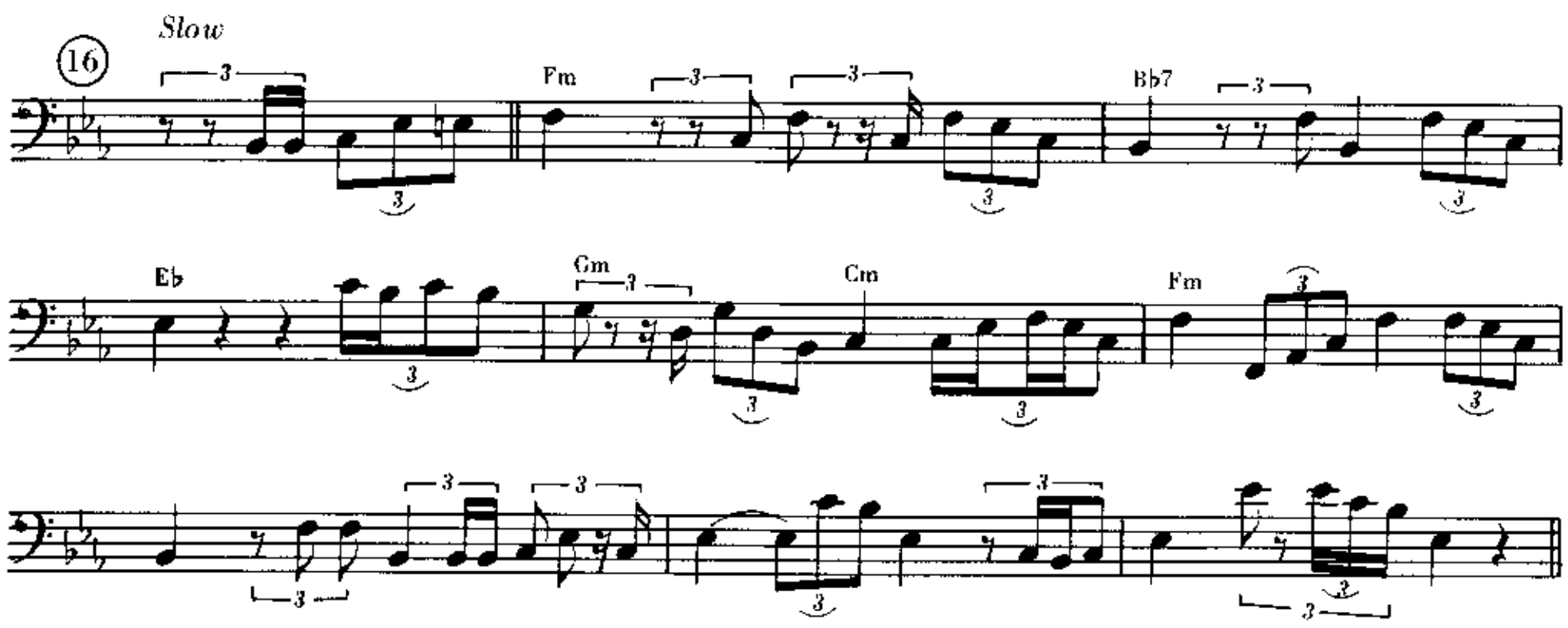


Another Pattern

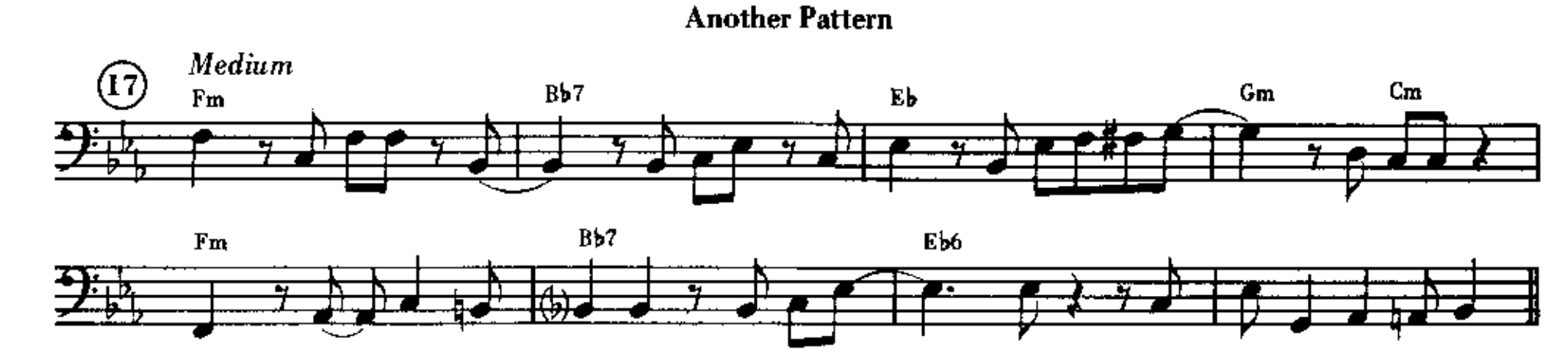


THE GOSPEL STYLE

This is really the "mother" of all Soul - derived from the old "Spiritual" songs and even now is played and sung in all of the "soulful churches". Maybe improperly named, but nonetheless well-known, this style is highly creative. It involves expression of man's most intimate feelings, happy and sad, in the simplest intense music.

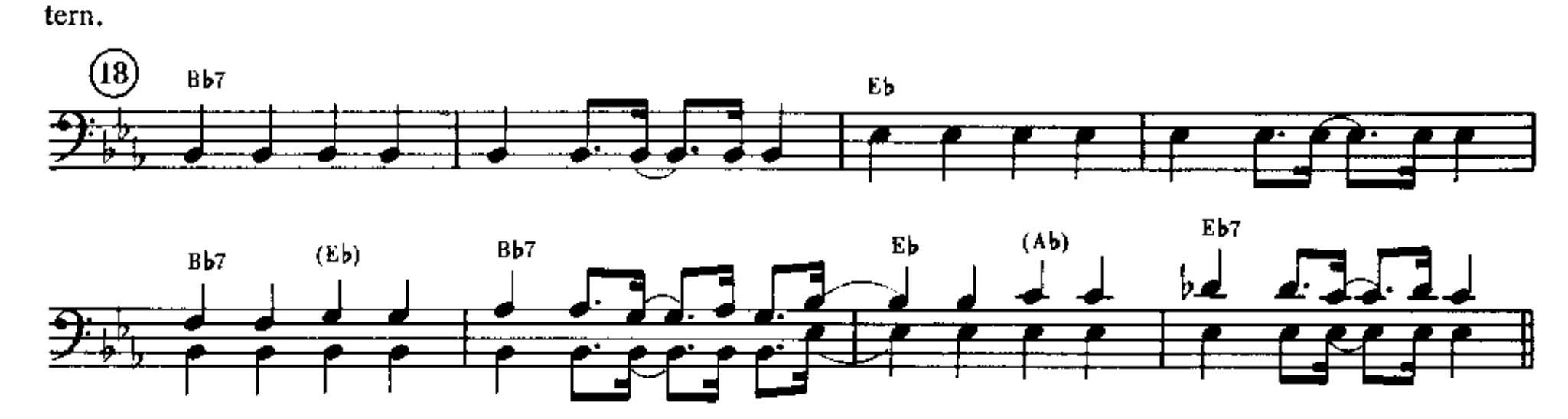


Another Pattern



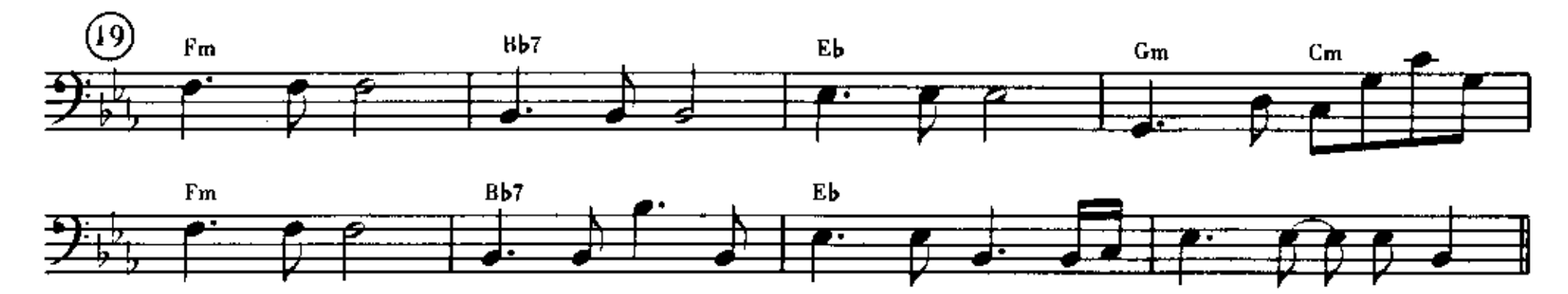
MEMPHIS AND/OR NASHVILLE STYLE

Originally very bluesy but simple, this is really a shuffle feel with heavy accents on every beat and an occasional off-beat push before the down-beat. Nashville style usually has a lot of "click" (treble) sound and is a more simple pattern.



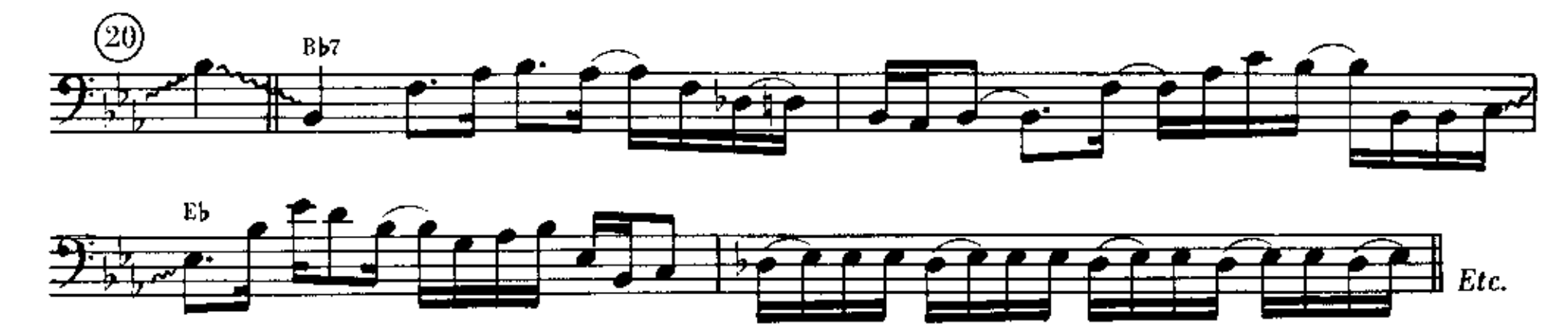
SOFT ROCK

California Rock has somewhat been designated as Soft Rock because most groups who have made this style popular originated in California, (The Beach Boys, The Mamas and Papas, The Fifth Dimensions, etc.). It can be either shuffle, such as "Good Vibrations"- one of the Beach Boys' many hits, or straight 8th, as "Up, Up And Away" by. the Fifth Dimension. It is more "rock" than "pop" but still has a light, good "swing" feel to it. "By The Time I Get To Phoenix" was recorded by Glen Campbell in this style.



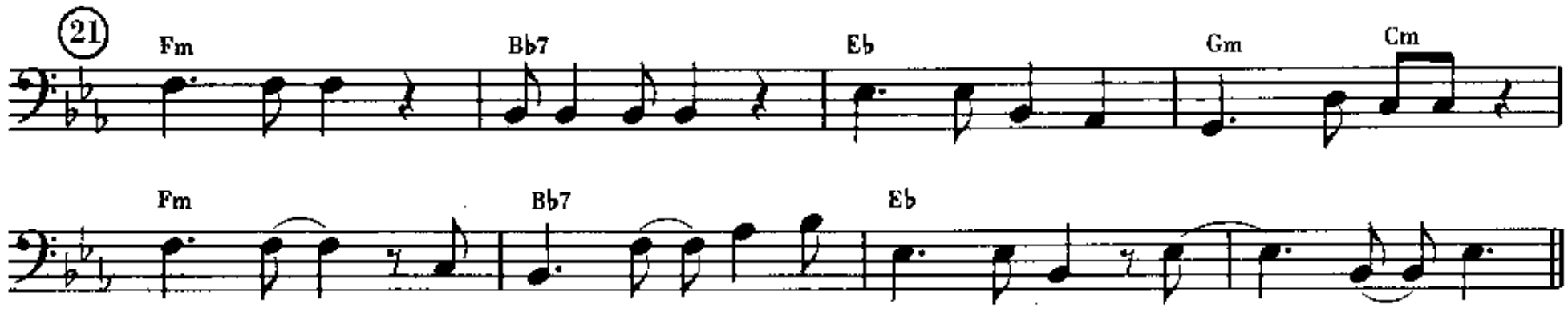
HARD ROCK

Acid (or Psychedelic) Rock is a highly-imaginative hard-feeling style. Usually freaky light shows help one to create in this style which requires the hardest physical playing of all. It is similar to Boogaloo, Memphis-Nashville, and Soft Rock all put together.



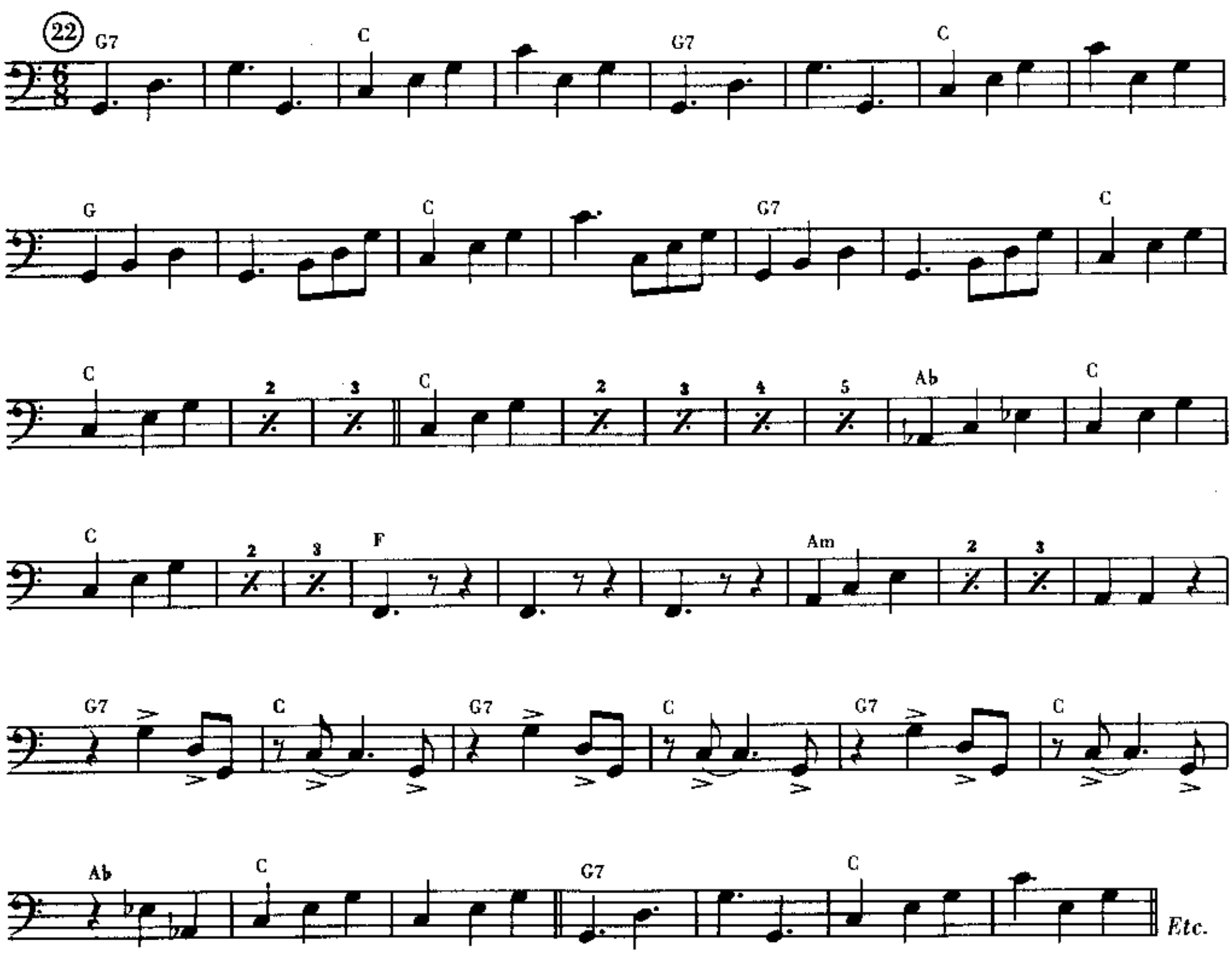
LATIN

This usually means a beautiful fast Bossa-Nova style but can be varied to include Samba, Cha-Cha-Cha, Mambo, etc. The unusual beauty of up-tempo music (Mambos, etc.) is enhanced by the bass playing only on beats 3 and 4. That takes getting used to but really swings.



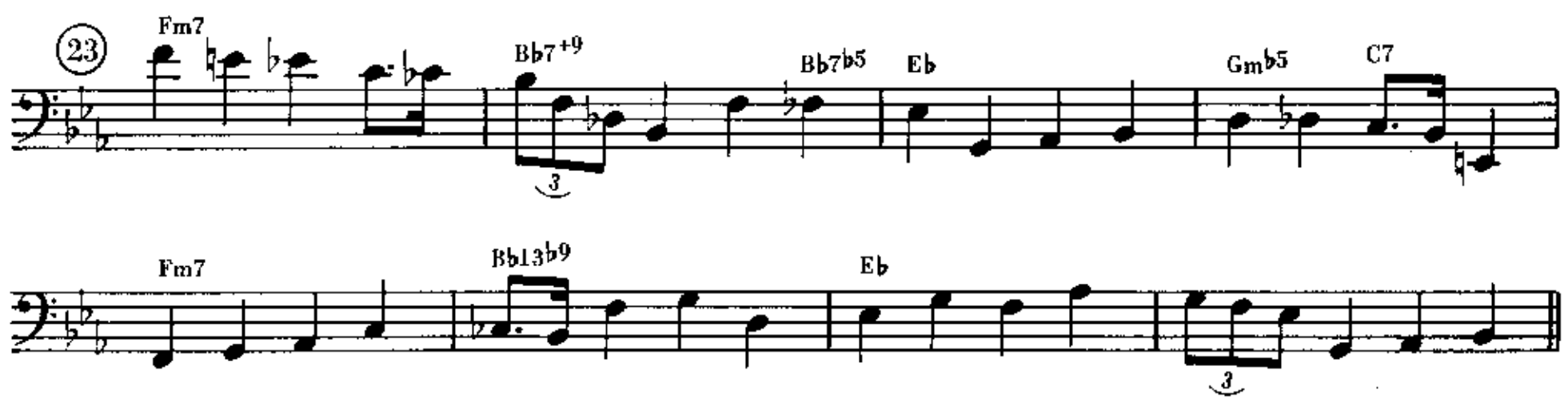
GUADALAJARA MARIACHI

Guadalajara Mariachi music features a unique rhythm in 6/8 time (or fast 3/4) with interesting contrasting time figures. Every tune has a bass line with definite time changes in certain parts. Below is an illustration of a Mariachi bass pattern. Note the change of feel from 6/8 March time in bar 1 to the quarter-note triplet feel in the 3rd bar. Another feature of this style is the important accent of the notes on beats 3 and 5 (2 and 3 in 3/4), alternating with accents on beats 2 and 6 (an of 1, an of 3 in 3/4).



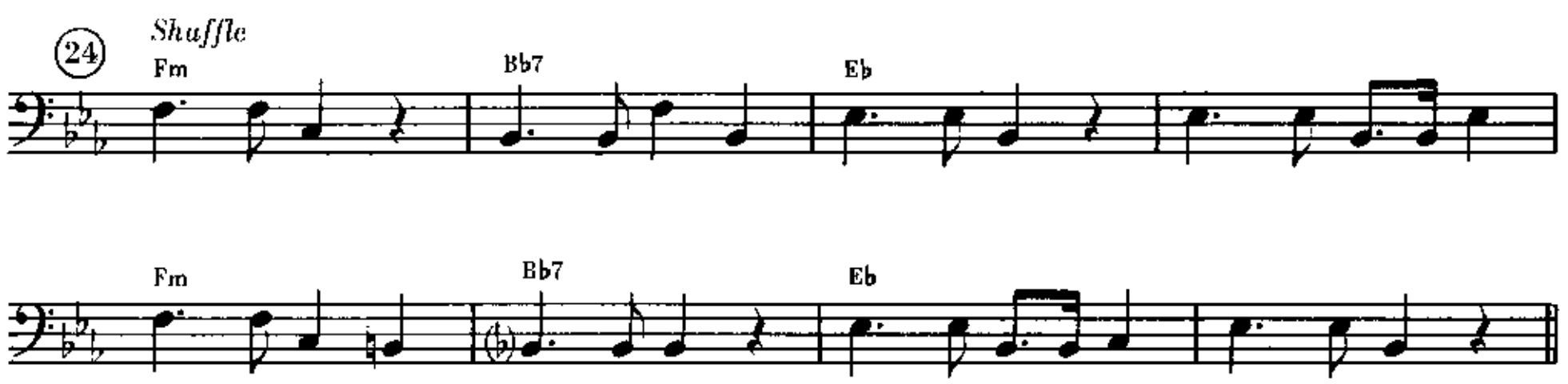
JAZZ

If you aren't acquainted with this style then you've missed something. To be able to play good Jazz, as currently performed, is a musical challenge. The musician's creative talent as a soloist is given its roughest test in performing within the hardest chord structures. Jazz grew from 2-beat Dixieland and Ragtime to 4-beat "Swing", to "Bebop", to wherever it's at now. Jazz seems to be taking on new forms utilizing the Soul music type of rhythm with a Latin feel lately. Below is an illustration of a common bass pattern in the basic tradition:



WESTERN

This is also called "Country-Western" which covers a lot of territory from Hillbilly to sophisticated Western music, all of which is greatly unique according to its style. It ranges from slow tunes (usually an easy shuffle), to fast Hoe-down Square-dance type music (straight 8th) which uses bass notes on beats 1 and 3.



It must be remembered that music is sometimes made up of a combination of styles. This section is to give the player an idea of the variations available to the bass player.

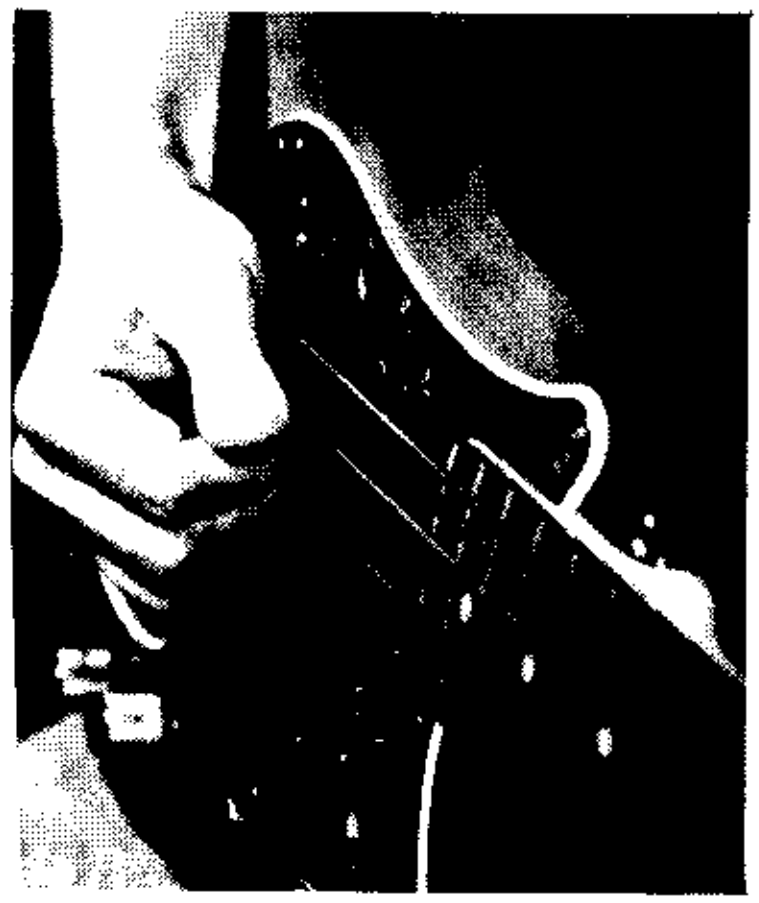
THE PICK

CHOOSING A PICK

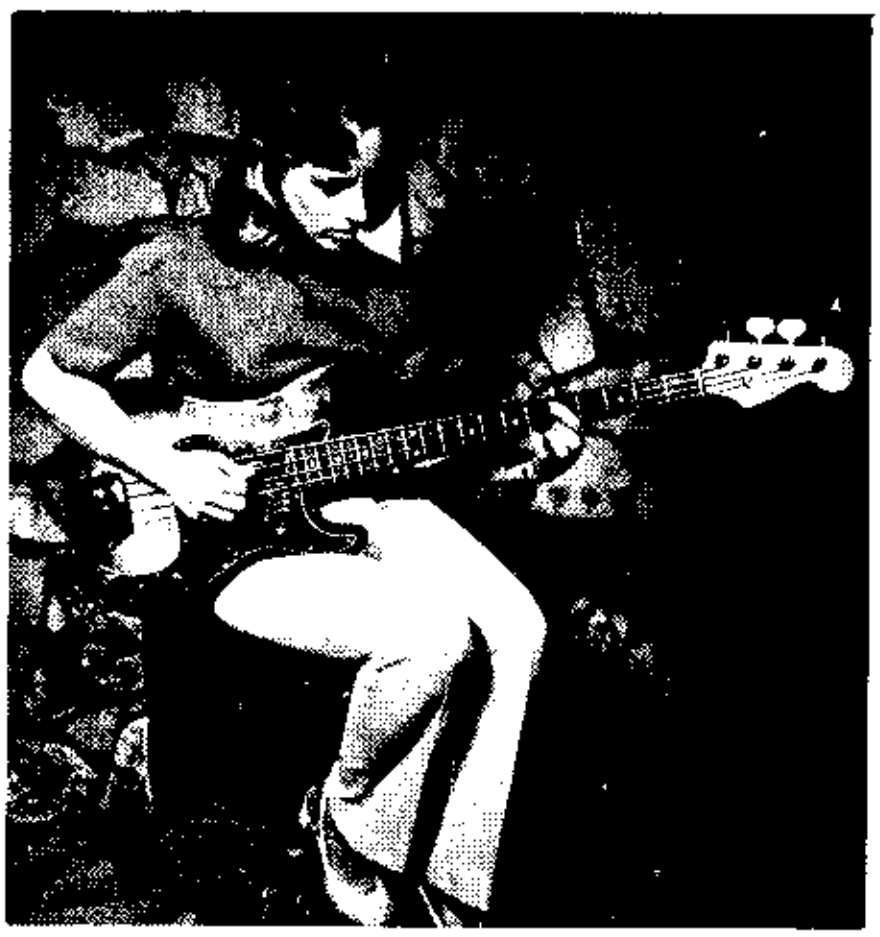
Down to the nitty-gritty first. Choose a pick that feels hard, not limber, on the small side as illustrated. Avoid thin picks. The softer (thinner) the pick, the less definite the sound will be. The hard pick enables one to obtain a good full bottom sound as well as the amount of "click" sound desired depending upon how much treble you have on your bass and amplifier. Below is an illustration of various picks which you will want to try in order to find the one most comfortable for you.

Various Picks

Holding the Pick



Correct placement of hand and arm



Holding the Bass

Note the placement of right hand over the strings. The flatness of the wrist gives better maneuverability. Picking about 1" in front of the pick-up should enable you to get the best sound but you may want to vary this sound by picking closer to the bridge(s). The pick should be held with a firm grip. The down-up motion should come mainly from the wrist while the forearm supplies the strength. Be sure wrist is flat. This is easier to practice if you sit. Keep the right forearm and elbow on the bass with a "hugging" feel as illustrated.

USING THE PICK

Guitar aided me to form a habit of picking down on the down-beat and up on the up-beat. I believe this basic concept may help you to gain control over your right hand better than any other method. This gives you greater speed and dexterity.

Shuffle = Down-up down-up etc.

Triplets = Down-up-up down-up-up etc.

Sixteenths should be played like eighths = Down-up down-up etc.

Pick down strokes slightly toward the right. Bottom of thumb muscle should touch string

Downstroke **Wrist Action With Pick** Upstroke

Below are three bass lines with indicated pick strokes. The beat is indicated to help you with the general feeling of picking with the PAT OF YOUR FOOT. DOWN on the down-beat and UP on the up-beat.

d = Downstroke **V** = Upstroke

Slow Straight 8ths

(25) d V d V d V V d V d

1 (2) an 3 (4) an 1 (2) an (3) an 4 e an

Etc.

Medium Shuffle

(26) d V d V d V d V V d V d V d V

1 a 2 a 3 a 4 a (1) a 2 a 3 a 4 a

Etc.

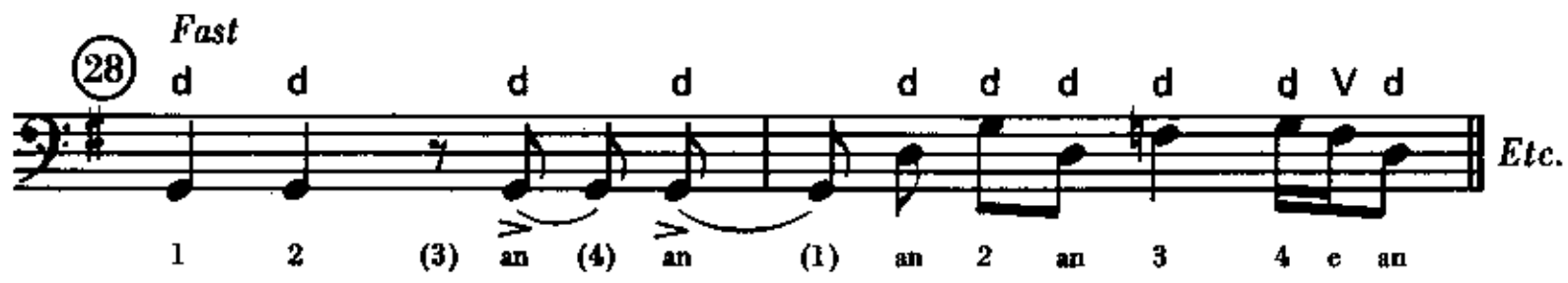
Slow Triplets

(27) d V V d V V V d V V d V V d V V V d V V

1 an a 2 a (3) an a 4 an a 1 an a 2 a (3) a 4 an a

Etc.

Now that you are used to the pick and can find intervals with your right hand, you will find yourself wanting to play mostly downstrokes for accentuated reasons, as for example:

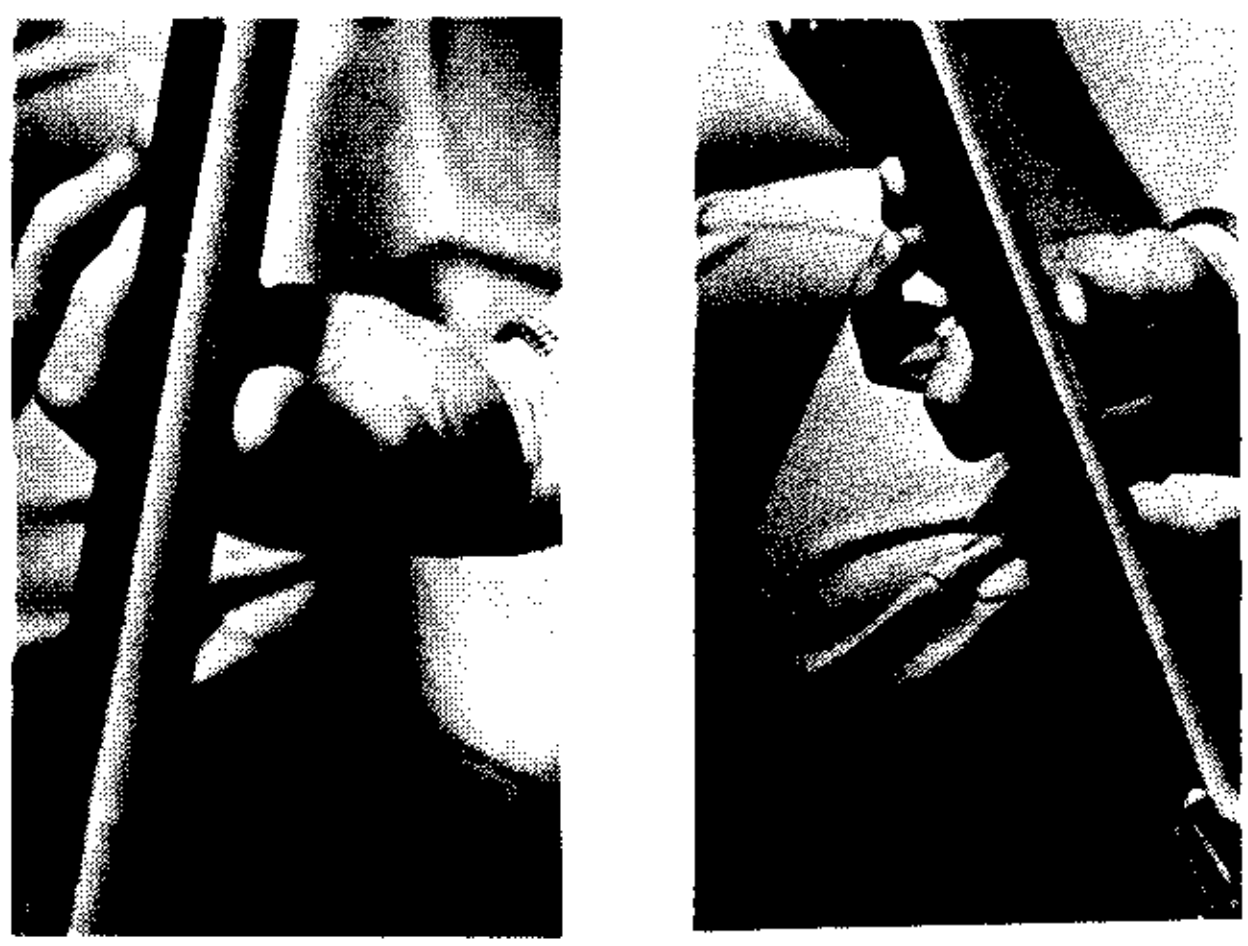


This is OK. However, BE SURE your upstrokes are practiced enough so you can use them effectively when needed, especially in Boogaloo and triplet patterns.

LEFT HAND FINGERING

The left hand should have the utmost freedom for speed and dexterity. Point thumb towards nut and keep it almost in the middle of the neck. Shift with front of hand and pivot when necessary. You will find the fingering on the Electric Bass similar to String Bass. Usually the finger that gets there the fastest is the best one - in short, you will naturally find good fingering. Just make sure your left hand has a good arch to it as illustrated.

Left Hand Fingering



SOLVING TIME PROBLEMS

You may have heard the expression - "He's got a beat like a cop". This is not supposed to be complimentary and I've heard it applied to a lot of Electric Bass players. If you feel like you may have a time problem, practice various tempos with an electric metronome (preferably the Franz) beating on 2 and 4 (like a drummer plays on his sock cymbal). This enables you to correct any "time" problems and enjoy doing it. You also develop a good sense of "feel" while playing with the electric metronome clicking on 2 and 4.

SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE

CHOICE OF ELECTRIC BASS

The choice of an Electric Bass is of personal taste, but a few reminders are needed. Usually strings are set too low; ignore this and concentrate on response, action, true pitch along with good low and high notes - you can adjust the strings later. The neck should not be too small as it will eventually cramp your hand; also, it should definitely have an adjustable rod in it. The instrument also should have adjustable bridges.

I prefer the Fender Precision for its wide range of sounds plus immediate-response pickups and excellent workmanship in general.

TUNING

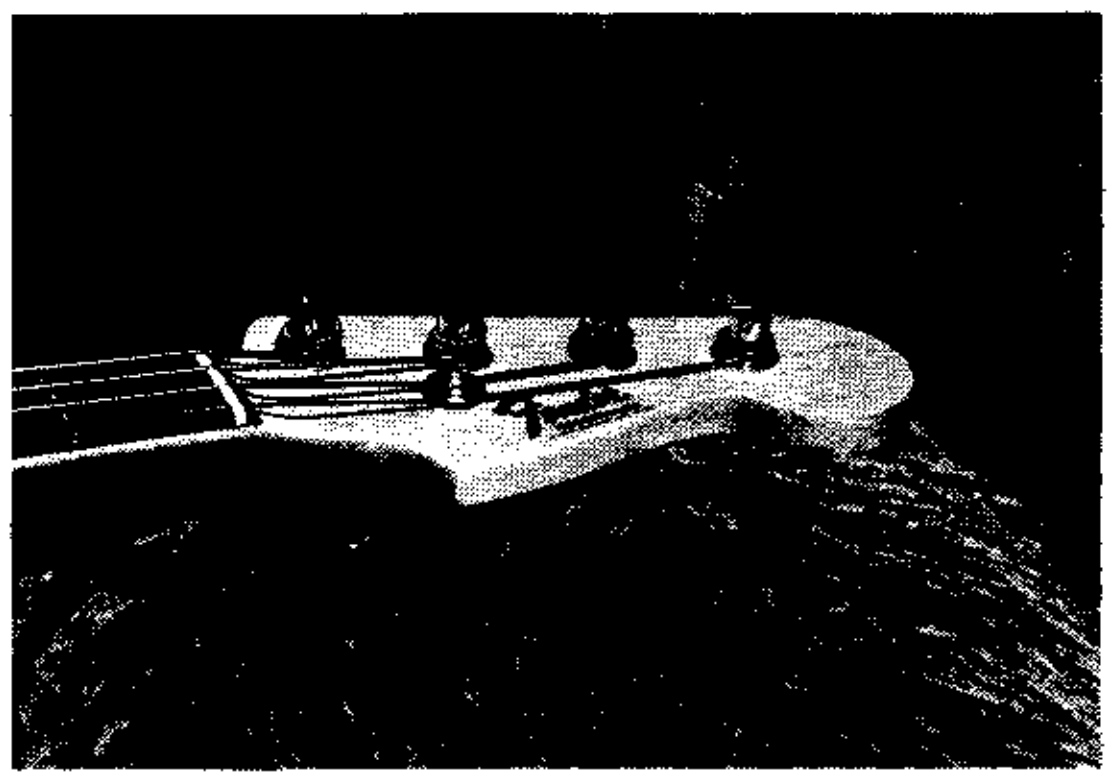
Usually tuning once a week is adequate except when keys are accidently bumped. You may have to adjust tuning for pitch problems but this is a minor problem. Always tune relative strings harmonically on 5th and 7th frets as well as relative note tuning.

ADJUSTMENT OF STRING HEIGHT FOR ACTION

(Suggestion: Remove pick-up guard from pick-ups to gain accessability for picking. This guard is unnecessary).

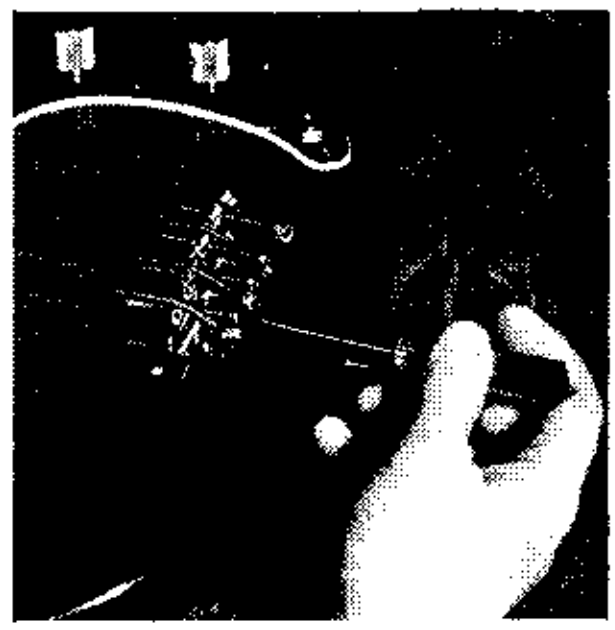
The strings should not be loose and flabby but fairly tight, with little give. To adjust strings, unscrew bridge-cover and tighten Phillips head screws in the back. This pulls the bridges back. At the same time, screw down individual bridges to raise each string to desired height. Strings should usually clear the fingerboard about 1/4" at the 12th fret. Make sure that strings are wrapped on tuning pegs so that final wrap is at the bottom of the tuning pegs. This gives you more string tension. If you seem to have problems, let a competent repairman adjust strings for you. Also, you should have the rod in the neck checked for proper adjustment.

The Tuning Pegs



Accuracy Of Pitch It's nearly impossible to get an Electric Bass perfectly true, interval-wise. Usually adjusting the bridges backward or forward will help but each instrument is different and strings also will vary. Don't give up. Once correct string height and bridge adjustments are found, no more adjustments are necessary. Always use good name brand strings.

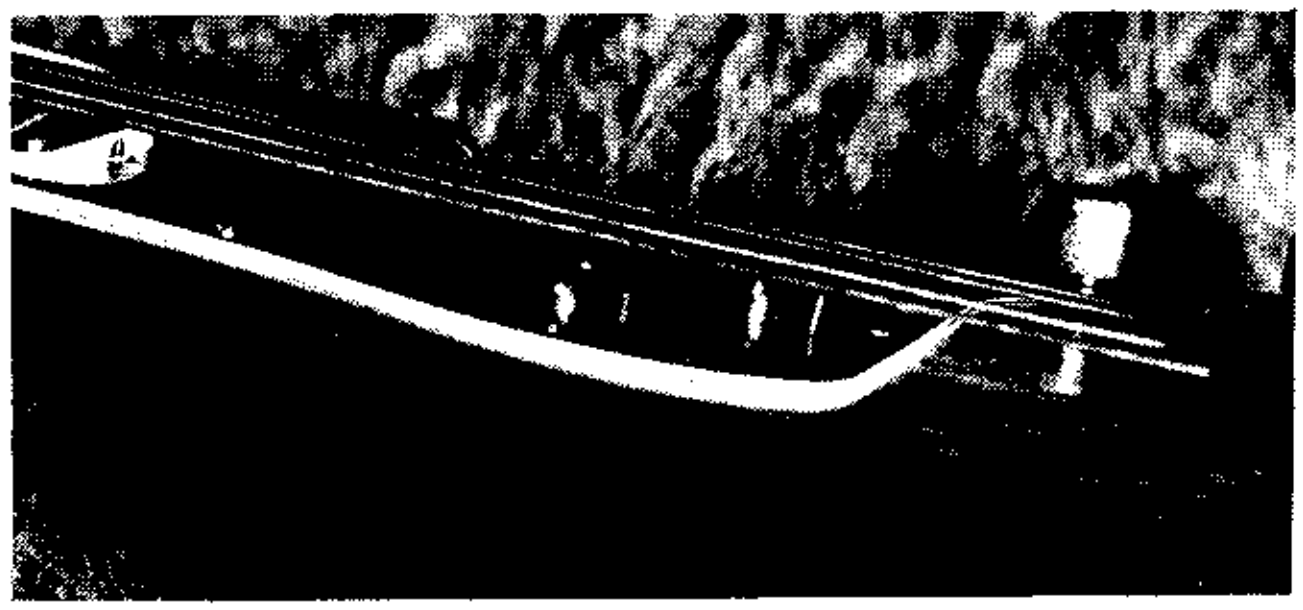
The Bridges



ADJUSTMENT OF ELECTRIC PICK–UPS

In the Fender Bass there are two overlapping pick-ups which are adjustable up and down. Make sure they are not too close to the strings as they will cause a "popping" sound when you play. 1/4" clearance on lower two strings and 3/16" on upper two strings (above pick-ups) is close enough for medium flat-wound gauge strings. A little more clearance is needed for larger strings. If one string sounds weak, either lower the string or move it over horizontally on the bridge a notch or two, if possible.

The Pick-Up(s)



CHOICE OF STRINGS

Nightclub or "Live" Performance Work: Heavier gauge strings are the more suitable strings.

Recording Work: Medium flat-wound gauge strings record better because of better recording note definition and also are good for all-around playing.

TO MUTE OR NOT TO MUTE

Even though the Fender Electric Bass has a rubber mute pasted on the inside of the bridgecover, this is usually insufficient - too many overtones occur. To compensate, simply place a thin piece of sponge rubber or felt on top of strings under the bridgecover mute. If you like the open string sound, remove bridgecover. Some players like to place a thick piece of sponge rubber underneath the strings next to bridges (with the bridgecover off) for a semi-muted sound.

CHOICE OF AMPLIFIER

There are many amplifiers on the market made for the Electric Bass. The Versatone Amplifier made in Sherman Oaks, California is my favorite for all styles. Monk Montgomery finds it useful for his Jazz bass work and the Jefferson Airplane group also uses this amplifier. The Versatone has a wide range of highs and lows in addition to good note definition and accessories such as reverb (echo) and tremolo. It is a strong amp and will not distort. Other good amplifiers you would like to try are Fender, Gibson, Vox, Ampeg, and Benson. When trying out an amplifier, make sure you get immediate note response, good bottom end, highs when needed and little or no distortion. Also, keep it away from vibrating objects and drapes and on a level floor when trying it out. If it sounds fuzzy, don't buy.

When playing, keep instrument volume knob on all the way. The treble knob can be varied but usually should be turned on most of the way for best results in sound.

CURRENT BASS LINES

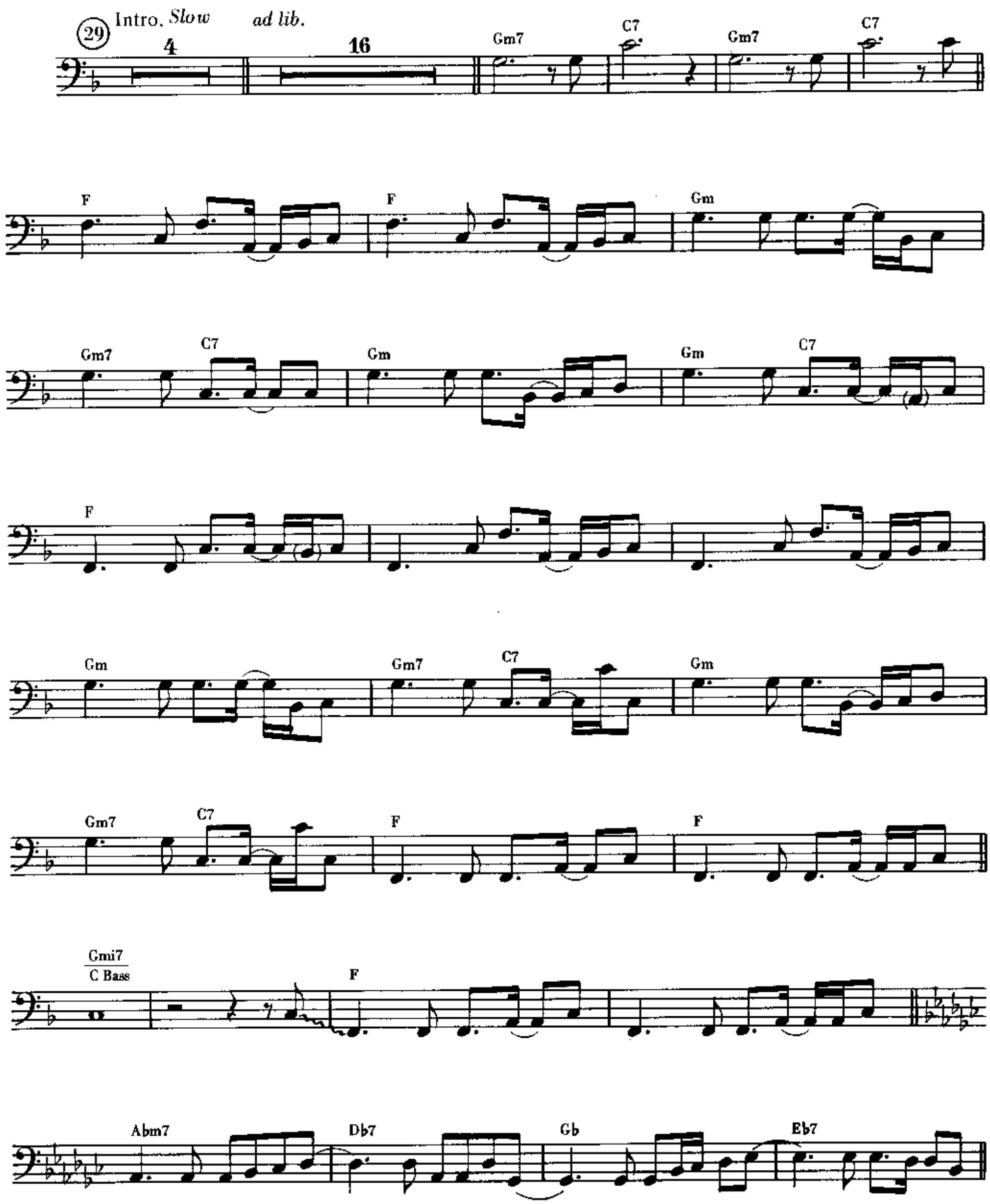
IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING AND PLAYING WITH RECORDS

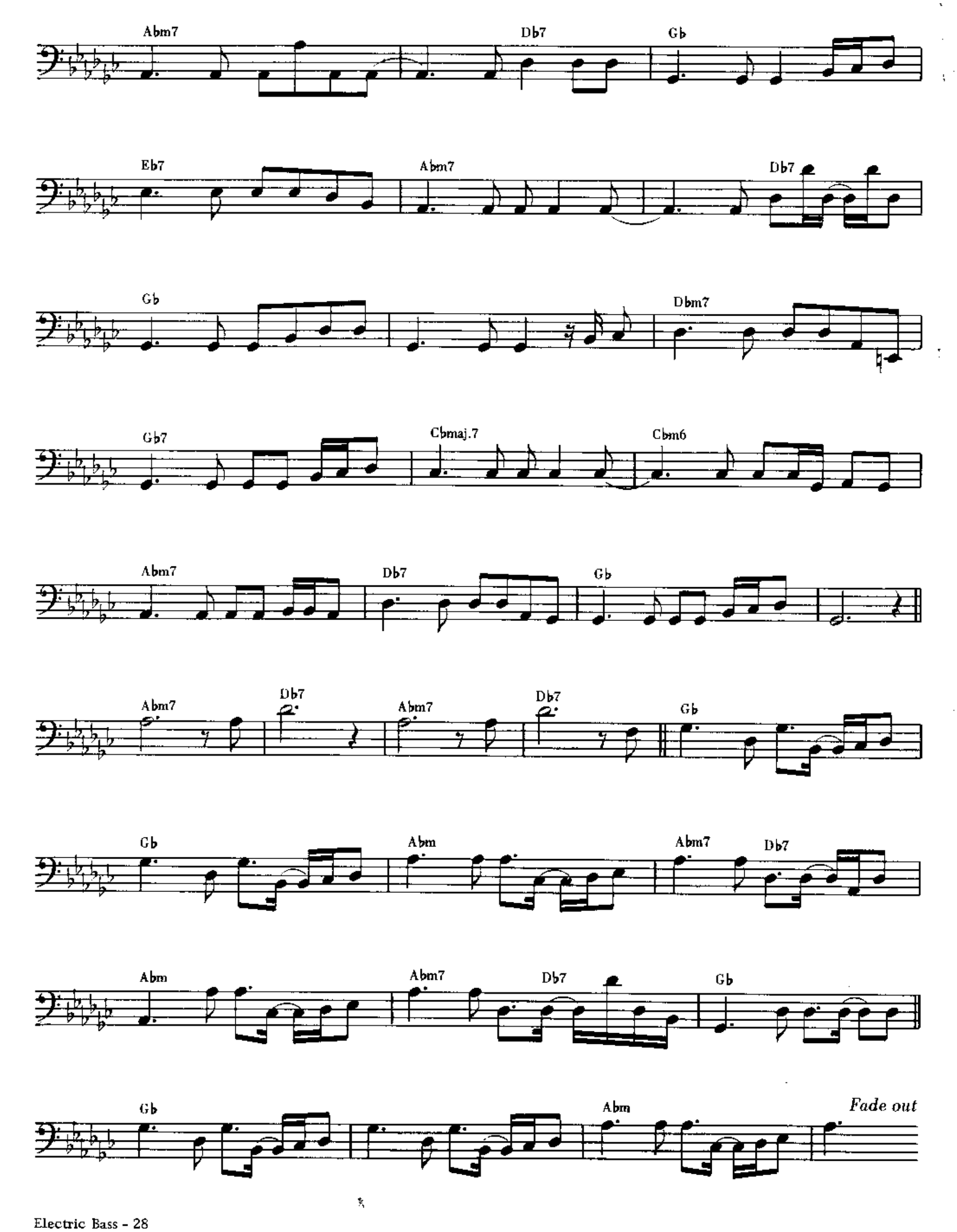
We all know how fast we learn to play by listening to music played with a good feel. Records are the best source of music to aid the student to play. Not only is this type of practice enjoyable but most times is of more value than playing with mediocre "live" groups.

Included in this book are bass lines I played on Nancy Wilson's record, "Peace Of Mind", Ray Charles' record, "I Don't Need No Doctor", and O. C. Smith's "Little Green Apples". Practicing these lines with these records will give you the "feel" and experience necessary to become very flexible on the Electric Bass.

Little Green Apples

Original Bass Line
(As Recorded with O. C. Smith)




Abm7
Db7
Gb
Eb7
Abm7
Db7
Gb
Dbm7
Gb7
Cbmaj.7
Cbm6
Abm7
Db7
Gb
Abm7
Db7
Abm7
Db7
Gb
Gb
Abm
Abm7
Db7
Abm
Abm7
Db7
Gb
Gb
Abm
Fade out

Double Time Bass Line

OCTAVE STUDY

Slow (Doubletime)

(As Originally Recorded)
with LALO SCHIFRIN

30

Dm Dm7 G/B Bb A7

Open A D String

I Don't Need No Doctor

RHYTHM AND BLUES – OCTAVE STUDY *(As Recorded with* Ray Charles)

31

Medium

Gliss

Dbm E Gb Dbm E Gb

Gb E B Gb E B

Dbm E Gb Dbm E Gb

Ab Gb Gliss

Dbm E Gb Dbm E Gb End

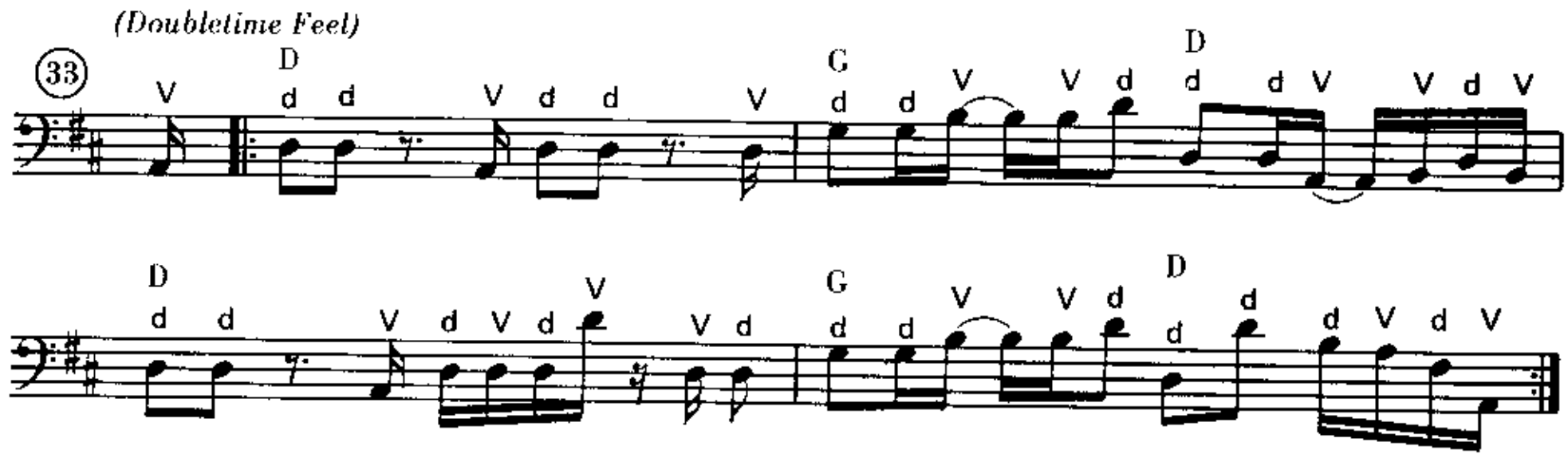
Fast Blues

32

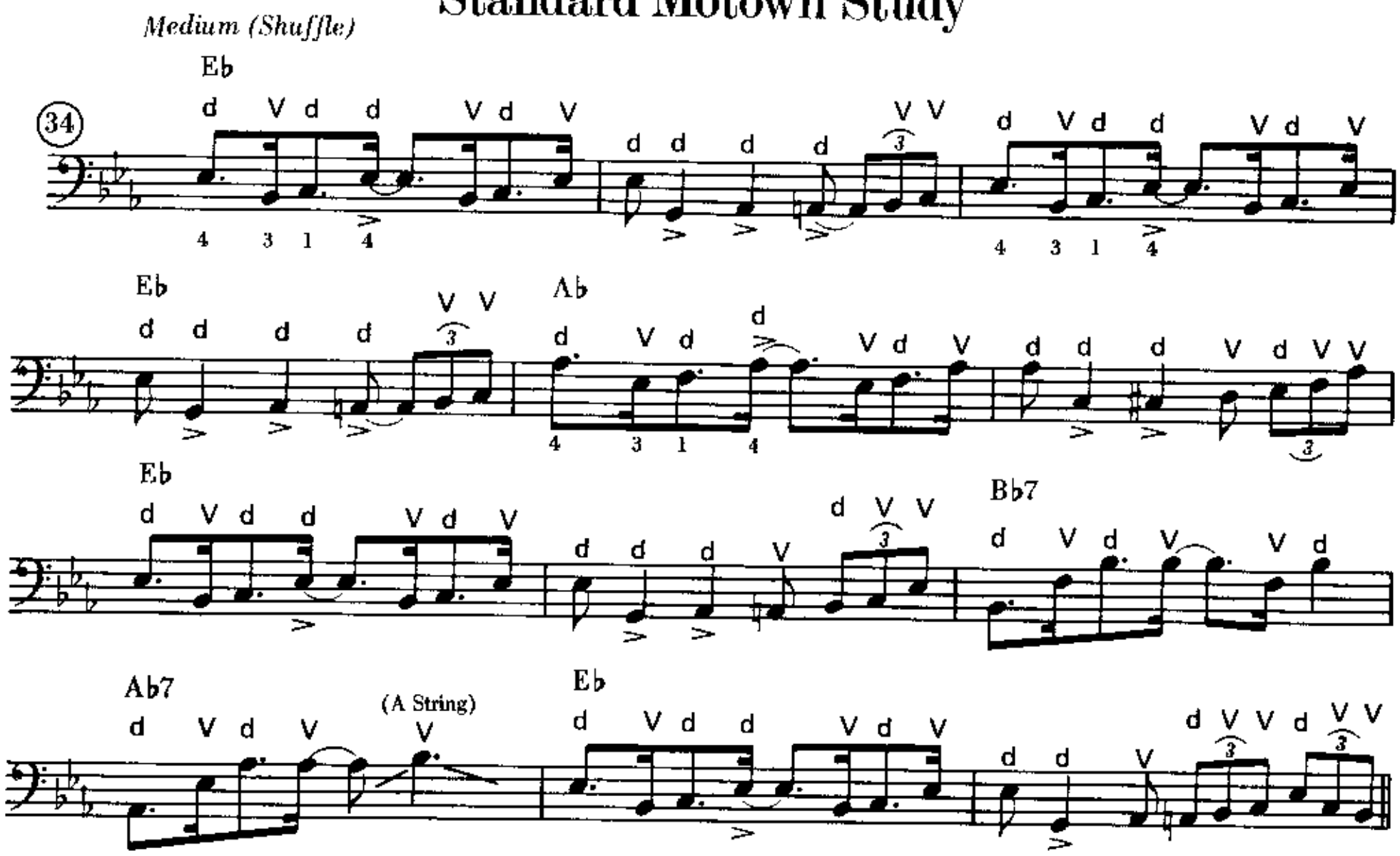
C7

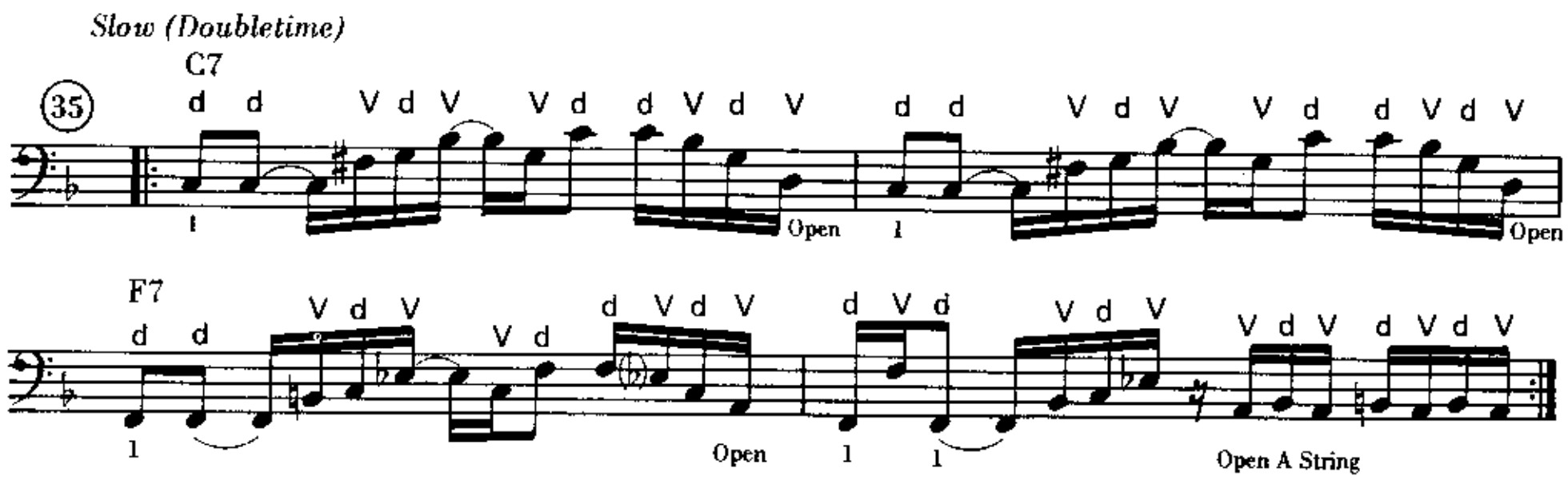
Etc.

Slow Boogaloo Study

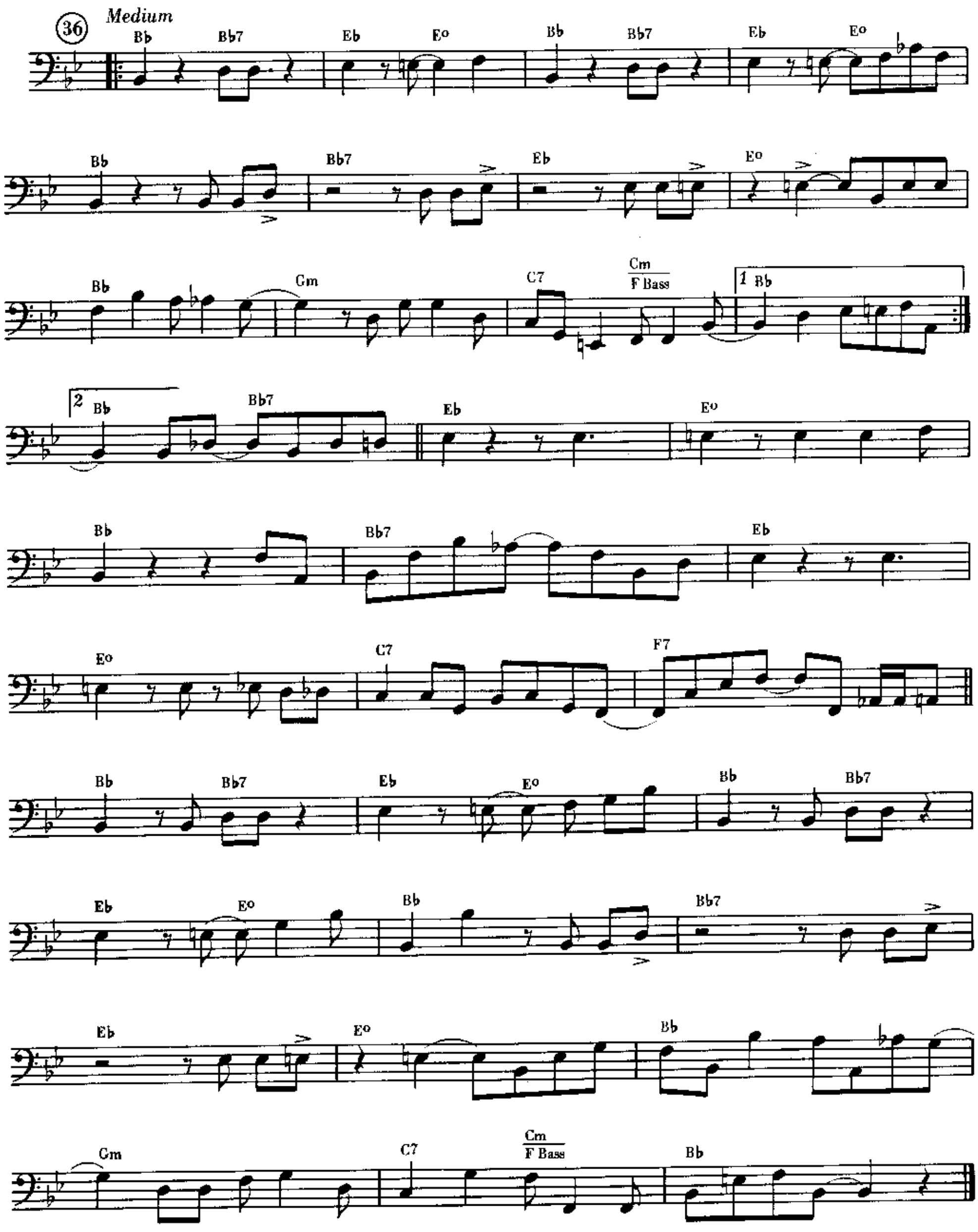


Standard Motown Study

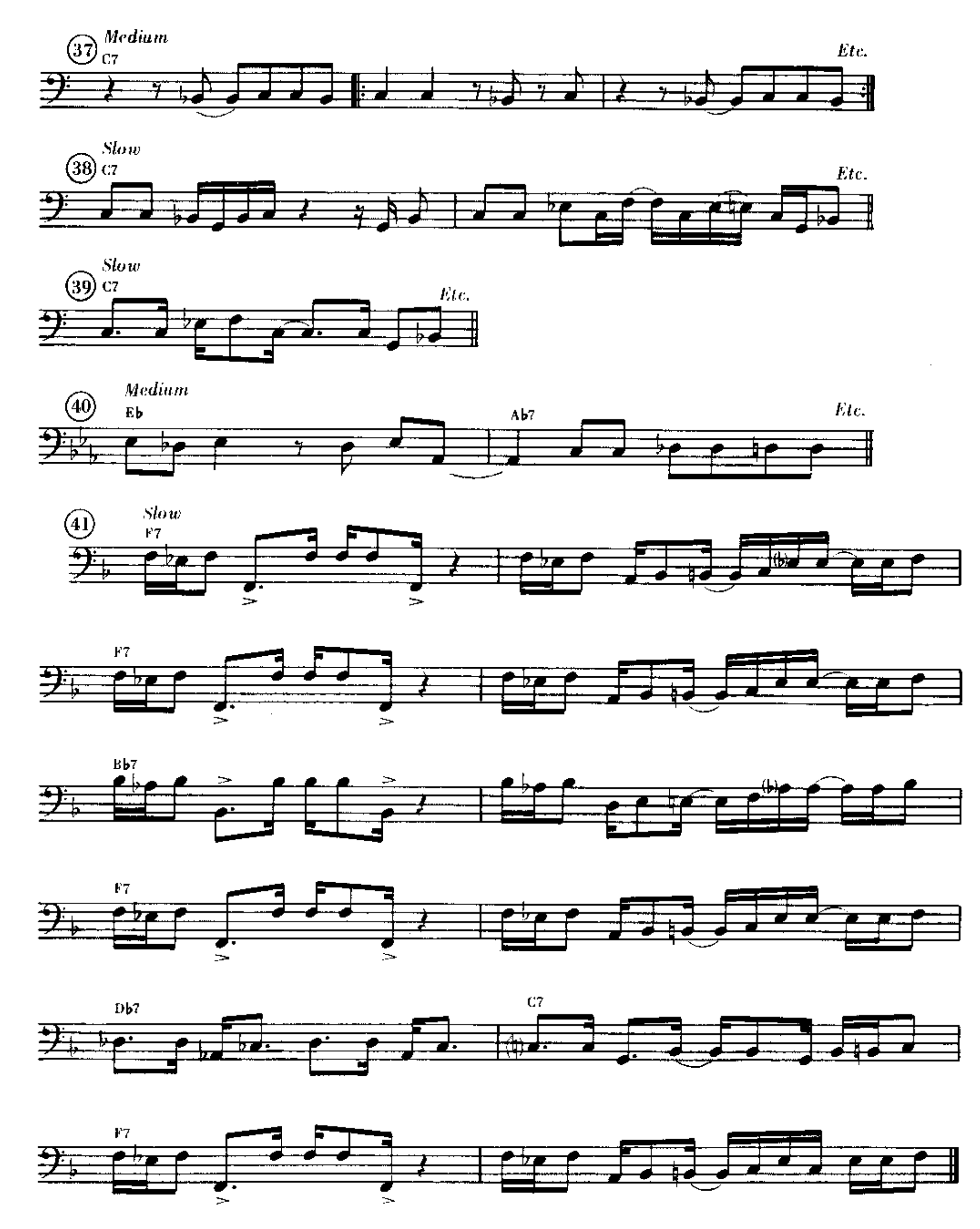




Gospel Study

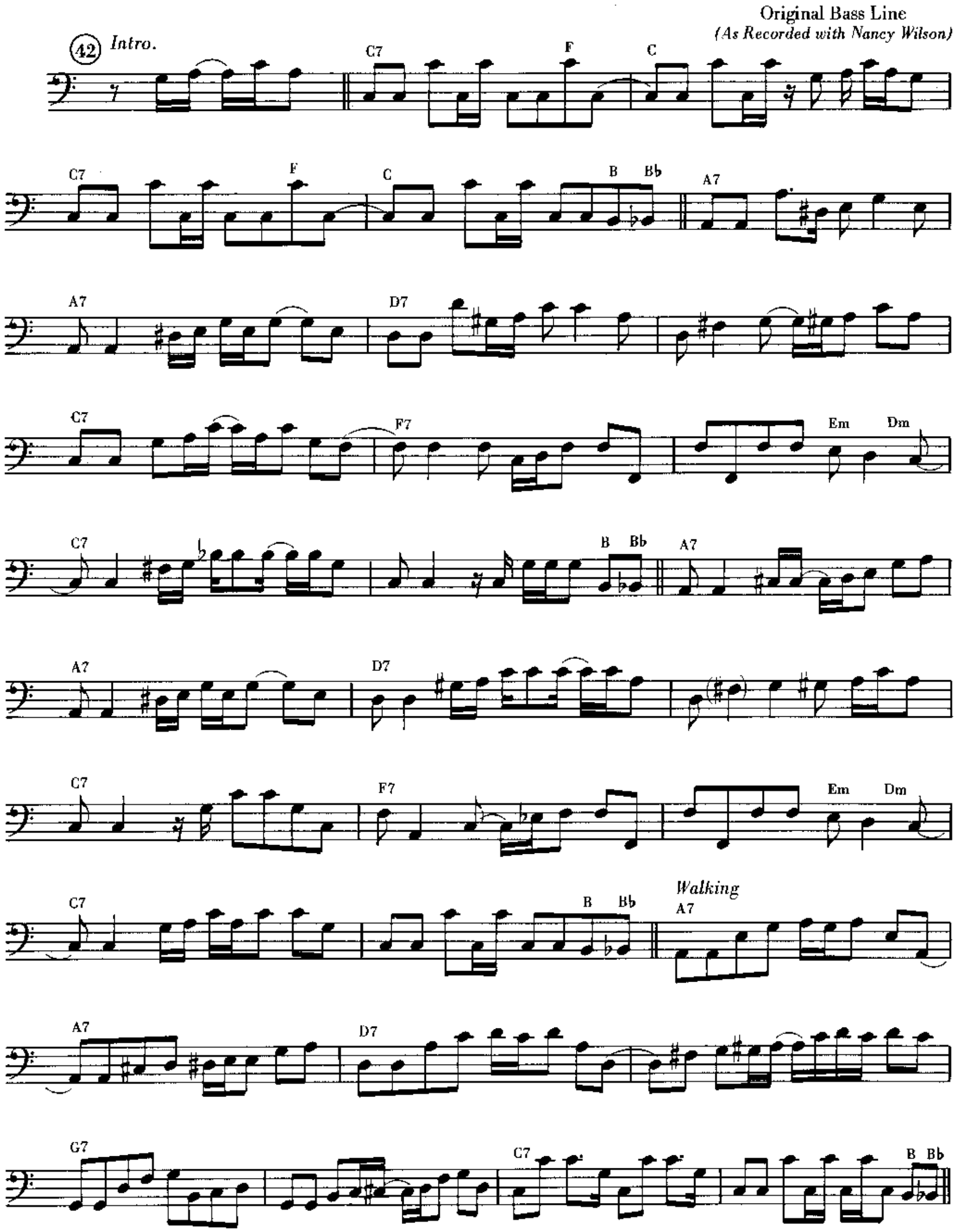


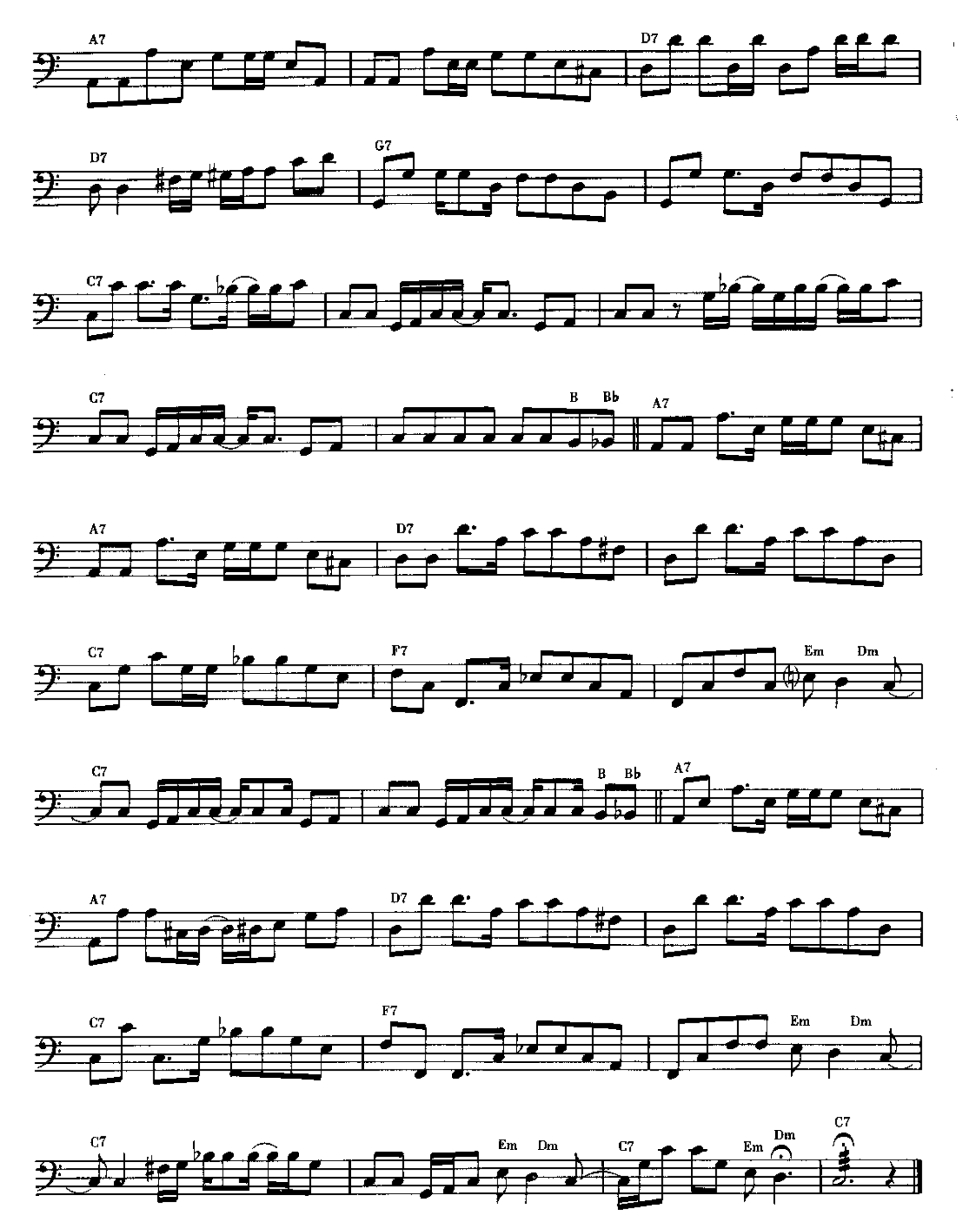
Boogaloo Studies



Peace of Mind

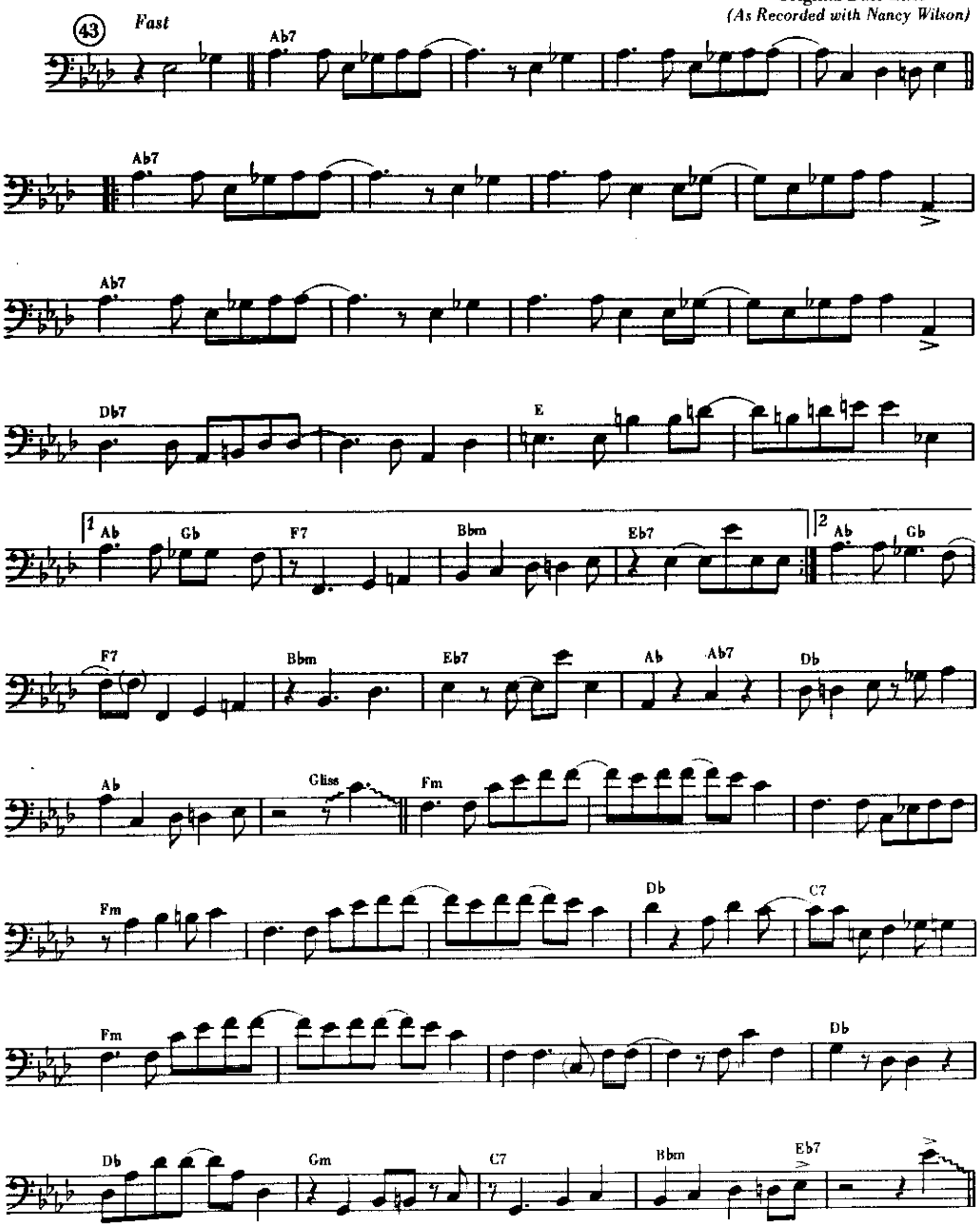
Original Bass Line
(As Recorded with Nancy Wilson)

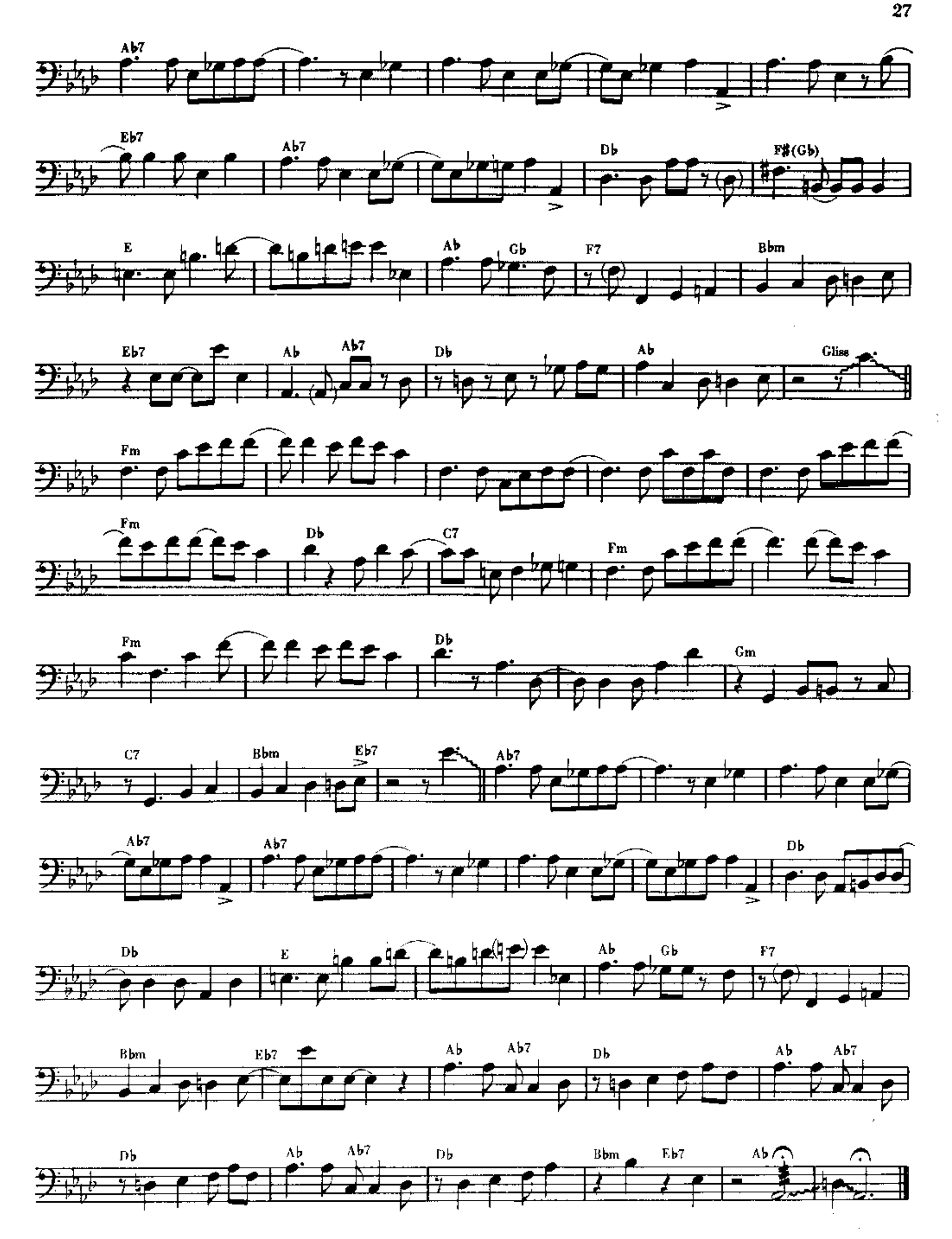



A7
D7
D7
G7
C7
C7
B Bb
A7
A7
D7
C7
F7
Em Dm
C7
B Bb
A7
A7
D7
C7
F7
Em Dm
C7
Em Dm
C7
Em
Dm
C7

Out of this World

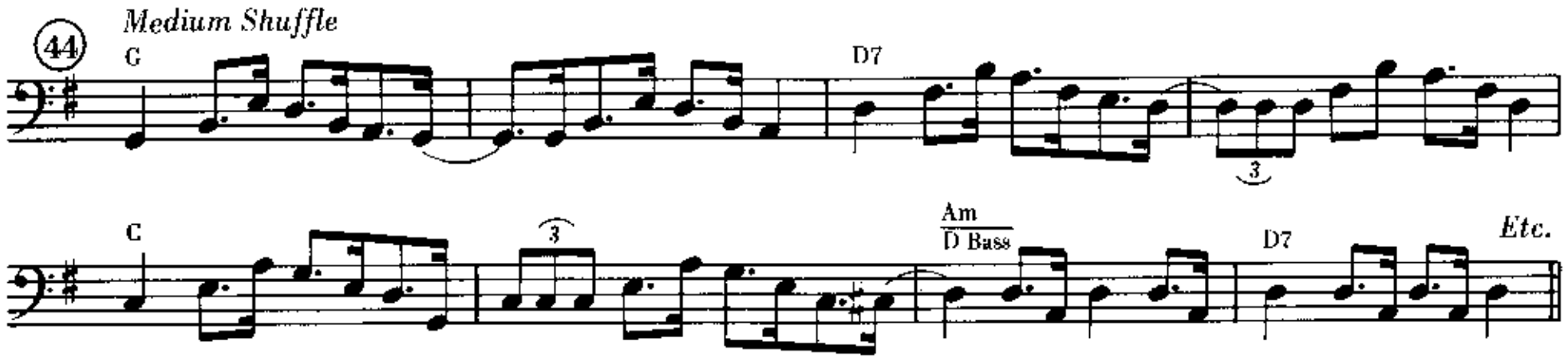
Original Bass Line
(As Recorded with Nancy Wilson)



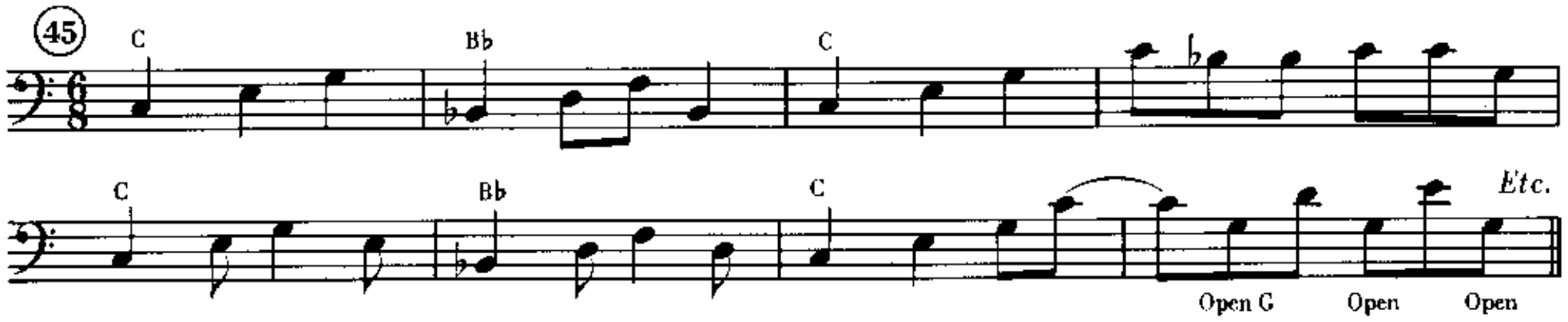

Ab7
Eb7
Ab7
Db
F#(Gb)
E
Ab
Gb
F7
Bbm
Eb7
Ab
Ab7
Db
Ab
Gliss
Fm
Fm
Db
C7
Fm
Fm
Db
Gm
C7
Bbm
Eb7
Ab7
Ab7
Ab7
Db
Db
E
Ab
Gb
F7
Bbm
Eb7
Ab
Ab7
Db
Ab
Ab7
Db
Ab
Ab7
Db
Bbm
Eb7
Ab

Miscellaneous Studies

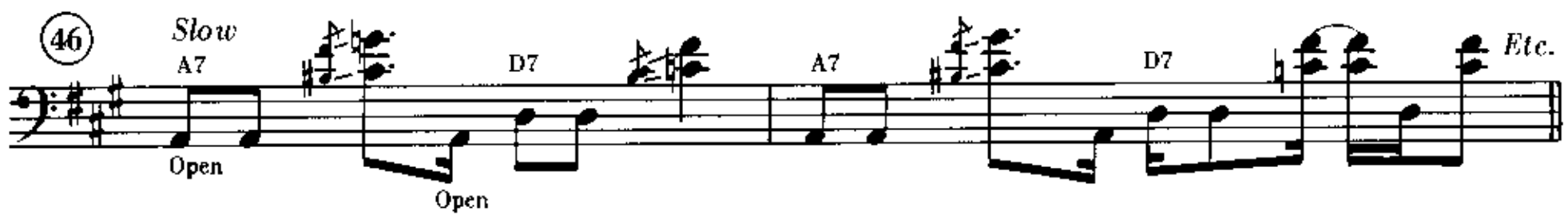
STUDY IN CALIFORNIA ROCK



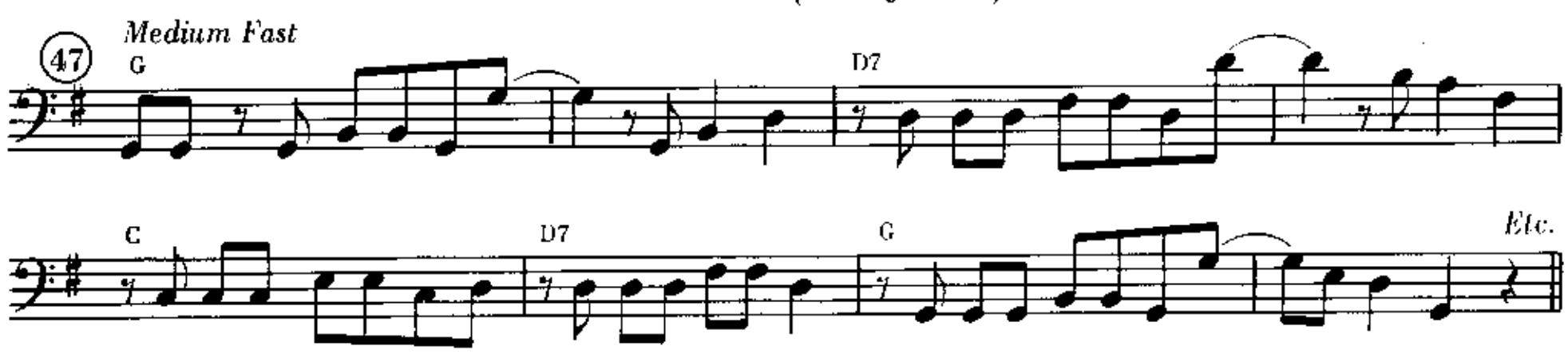
STUDY IN 6/8



DOUBLE STOP BOOGALOO



THE REGGAY (From Jamaica)



I hope these studies will enable you to be a good inventive bass player. Remember to always listen to what style the tune is, what the drummer is playing, and how the lead goes rhythmically as well as harmonically. What you will play will be the basic root of all this.

Carol Kaye